Espoir

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Espoir

by beetlehands

Summary

Fate pulls together a 20 year old Will Graham and a 26 year old Hannibal Lecter to each other over and over again.

Will works the night shift in a 24 hour coffee shop, Hannibal is a medical student with 2 years left of his course. They become close friends, opening up to each other. Filling out that empty space both individuals have felt their entire life.

Yet, they're forced to part after Hannibal moves away to pursue his dream of becoming a surgeon.

18 years later, special agent Will Graham is called in to Agent Crawford's office on a miserable afternoon. What will happen when the only person who has ever been able to make cold, closed off Will Graham smile and open up is seen, sitting in Jack Crawford's office. And how Will react when he founds out said person is his new psychiatrist. Will Hannibal even recognise him now? Does he even want to recognise him for that matter?

Will and Hannibal meet in a coffee shop and become close friends. But are forced to part after Hannibal leaves to become a surgeon. 18 years later, special agent Will Graham meets his psychiatrist - Doctor Hannibal Lecter.

Currently in a break, but I refuse to leave this unfinished!!

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

> As this is the first chapter, it's a little shorter than I'd hoped it to be. But trust me, the others should all be a lot longer than this.

Will walks slowly, careful to not step on any of the cracks underneath his feet. Looking intensely down at the stone pavement beneath his old timberlands. The leather of them worn down and moulded to fit his feet perfectly after years of wear. It's dark outside. The only light coming from the very few shops still open and the lamp posts - buzzing with electricity as they flickered momentarily.

He’s 10 minutes into the 20 minute walk from his block of flats to the coffee shop he works at. A small, not-so-busy place on the outskirts of London. It’s open 24 hours a week, convenient with the amount of students and universities in the area. Will works the night shift for most days. At the moment, he’s sure it’s about 10:45pm. It was the only job Will was able to get. Being an American student who seemed to have no previously recorded formal education - other than the university he currently attended. It was pretty difficult to get a decent job with those qualifications.

10 minutes of walking later, Will pushes open the glass door, sounding the ‘ding’ of a bell as it swings on its not-so-well oiled hinges. No one is working the counter, yet luckily there's no customers either. Which is likely to be the pattern for the rest of the night. The other worker is probably out on her ‘smoke break’ like she always is. Will doesn’t mind her absence. He’s grown used to standing silently by himself. Blocking out whatever shitty pop music is playing from a broken speaker that he can’t seem to locate.

Will replaces his strange smelling coat with one of the aprons hanging up behind the counter. Struggling to tie the back and eventually giving up, letting it just hang around his neck. He takes his place behind the counter. His fingers absently tapping against the metal countertop along with the beat of the song playing.

Will sits there for a long while with his thoughts, eyes darting around the enclosed space until after some time, he zones out. This was the usual routine: Get to work, struggle to tie up the pointless apron, sleep with eyes open for 4 hours, go home.

Well, that's the *usual* routine. Tonight, for example, is when that routine sometimes changes. It must’ve been an hour into Will’s shift when the tall, well dressed man walked in. The ring of the bell doesn’t alert Will out of his trance. Not wanting to be rude, the stranger waits quietly in front of the register.

Realising a change in Will's blurred vision, he's quickly kicked out of his tired state of mind. A customer has walked in - a rare occurrence. It just so happens that this stranger is quite, how could Will describe him, unique looking. No, that sounds as if he's calling him ugly - that really *wouldn't* the term to describe him. In fact, it'd be quite the opposite. This man was tall. He wasn't like the men Will remembered in America. Of course, Will had met attractive looking men in his life, but not like this. The tall, well-dressed customer had strong cheekbones, very lightly coloured eyebrows that didn't match the colour of his dark brown, slicked back hair. His eyes weren't quite brown, but instead a sort of red colour. He looked young, yet so mature. Possibly quite a bit older than Will, but not 'old' old.

The stranger met Will's eyes, noticing that he had left his tranced state. Will quickly looked away, breaking eye contact and quickly started to apologise.

"I'm so sorry. I'm- we don't, well-" Will looked beside him behind the counter. "-well *I* don't tend to get customers this time of night." Will masked his southern accent, conscious of it, covering it with a much more 'generic' American accent. "Sorry again, what could I get for you today,- or I guess tonight?."

The stranger smiles as he stumbles over his words, charmed by Will's panicked state.

"I'll take a medium size coffee, black, thank you." The customer had an accent. Pronouncing his words softly, but still easily understandable.

Will started to move as he rung the customer up. Fingers tapping lightly over the cash register, his hands still shook slightly from the surprise interaction.

"Sorry, you caught me off guard a little there. The most action we get at this time of night are robberies and the occasional serial killer." Will smiles as he jokes with the customer. "And that's two pounds, twenty-five." He looks up expectantly at the stranger.

The well dressed foreign man reaches into his pocket. "Ah well, you never know. Perhaps I truly am a serial killer-" He hands Will the money. Will takes it, his fingers brushing lightly over the other man's. "-hunting for the perfect piece of art to become my next victim."

Will laughs as he moves around behind the counter, beginning to make the coffee. Surprising himself at just how well he's able to speak to a stranger.

"It's nice to have a change around here." Will starts. "Someone with a sense of humour I mean- -not the serial killer part. We already get plenty of those."

They both laugh together as Will pulls out a paper cup for the drink.

"I would usually ask for a name for this order, but it seems that I can't exactly mix it up and accidentally give you the wrong drink with our current circumstances, so I won't bother." He says with a smile. He moves to pour the drink into the cup.

"Hannibal."

“I’m sorry?” Will abruptly stops what he’s doing. Standing still, holding the empty paper cup and staring at the handsome stranger.

“The name - Hannibal.” The stranger smiles, as if Will didn’t look like he’d just called him four different slurs and stole his cat.

The colour returned to Will’s face as he forced his limbs to move and continue to pour the coffee. “Oh. Oh, yes. I’m sorry. I thought I heard something else.” Will laughs out nervously. Embarrassed by his sudden outburst and reaction to this kind man’s name. Not that he's ever considered trying to make a friend. He now knows that chance is long gone.

“All fine, that music is excessively loud. Quite the distraction when attempting to speak.” Hannibal says as he looks around, trying to find the source of the ear pain.

“That’s what I’ve been thinking! Try sitting alone for four hours with nothing but that music as a distraction. I would rather go through some sort of mediaeval torture method.” Will laughs as he hands the hot paper cup to the customer - to Hannibal. The name felt like it had some sort of familiarity in Will’s mind. It was like hearing the name of a friend you haven’t seen in years or the name of a dead celebrity you used to look up to. Will decided it wasn’t important. If he’d ever met Hannibal he’d remember. I mean - who could forget such a face.

Hannibal thanks Will. Saying goodbye as he walks towards the door. Stopping suddenly at the cash register. He pulls out a five pound note from his pocket and smiles to himself as he drops it into an empty plastic cup labelled ‘tips’.

Will stands still. Staring at the glass door as Hannibal walks out. The handsome stranger smiles at him through the glass as he closes it. Showing a glimpse of his sharp canines. A genuine smile, not the kind you give just to be polite.

He’s still staring minutes after the customer walked away, as if he’s going to walk back in. Looking longingly, imagining the handsome man coming back just to talk with Will a little longer. To fill that lonely person-shaped hole in his mind.

–Espoir–

4AM. The person working the next shift suddenly walks in. This time the bell of the door break’s Will’s trance. He looks at the clock, discovering the time, wondering how it seemed that time passed so much quicker than usual. Taking his apron off, fingers rubbing back and forth on the fabric as he walks to hang it back up. He throws on his Dad’s old fishing coat, pushing his arms through the sleeves that were just a little too long for him. A coat is a coat though. Doesn’t have to fit. What matters is that it keeps you warm. Managing to make zero communication or contact with the other overworked, tired looking teenage worker, Will leaves.

The scruffy man walks through the streets, again staring down at the worn timberlands. Careful with his steps. Yet also cautious of his surroundings as the cold wind pierces his skin like tiny daggers when added with the sharpness of the winter rain of London. He doesn't listen to music. Too dangerous to be any sort of distracted - or to look distracted at that matter - when walking the streets of South London after 8pm. Will walks with his hands buried deep into the coat pockets. One hand rubbing against the lining of the coat as the pocket breaks through. He's lost his fair share of pens to this coat. They just fall into the lining and never seem to resurface.

Something deep inside of him - a feeling he'd buried as deep as it would go, praying for it not to resurface - wished he was walking with someone. He wasn't sure where this feeling came from. Perhaps fear? But even then, he'd take anyone, they wouldn't need to protect him. Just some company would make him feel somewhat safer.
Walking through these streets does make Will miss the only thing he ever liked about his hometown. The heat. The weather was never unpredictable. Will always knew what was going on the next day, how the weather would be and what he'd need to wear. With English weather, you could never know. The most beautiful sunny day you've ever seen may grace the London skyline on Monday, but then the roof of his block of flats may be covered in snow on Wednesday. Then who knows, a thunderstorm the day after that? Then you'd be back to that hot, sunny weather again.

After what seems to be much shorter 20 minutes than usual, Will arrives at his building. Taking his hand out his pocket as he walks up to the door and pushes it open. He has to put all his weight into it because of how old and broken the door is. You'd have better luck breaking into a safe. Walking in he realises that it's practically the same temperature inside then it is out. That's when he remembers the smashed window at the end of the hallway. How did that even happen? Small pieces of glass litter the stone floor. Of course nobody bothered to clean it up in the 3 days that it's been broken. Not Will's problem though. He doesn't live on the ground floor. He won't be stabbed in the foot whenever he wants to leave.

Will takes the stairs. Surprisingly there is an elevator - a working one at that - however it still has a smell. Not necessarily a bad one. Just a smell. A smell that really makes Will's hair stand up and teeth full funny. He half-runs up the stairs, the cold air really starting the get to him knowing there's a bed waiting for him in this building.

Fumbling with the keys in the good pocket of his coat, he finally pushes up the door using his shoulder and the side of his boot. Taking in the insulated walls, of course there was no heating on - too expensive of course - just no smashed window. His only roommate is sleeping on the sofa in the middle of the room. The place had 3 rooms. A bedroom - where Will slept -, a bathroom and the main room. This included a 'kitchen' and the sofa that his roommate was sleeping on, along with the TV in front of him, playing formula one. Will had found the TV dumped outside his neighbour's door one night when returning from work, he'd never seen his roommate so happy. They didn't speak often. Will was awake when he was asleep. He was awake when Will was asleep. Infact, Will had no clue what the poor guy's name was. He was just 'roommate'.

Will walked over to the door of his room. Dumping his coat on the floor by a set of drawers. He had only just thought about the fact he knew genuinely nothing about the man he lives

with. And to be honest, he realised he knew nothing about anyone. He never had many friends back home in America. Never knew any family other than his Dad and his uncles and their wives. The only person he'd really had a proper conversation with in years was that guy from his work tonight. Will realises how little contact he really has with anyone. How often does he really make a true connection with someone? Will anyone understand him? He sees people at his campus laughing and chatting with their friends on their breaks. Will he ever get something like that? Probably not. Not in this lifetime at least. Will was lonely.

Kicking off his shoes, he pushes these thoughts back down. His Father's voice echoing around the now crowded walls of his head as changed his shirt to sleep. 'Don't be sucha fuckin' pussy boy. Real men don't need these strong fuckin' emotions. Stop bein' sucha queer and quit cryin' like a girl.' His thick southern accent drawing out the words longer than Will would over choose to hear them for. He sits on the edge of his bed and suddenly he's 12 again. Skinny frame hid under an oversized shirt. Ripped up jeans being held up by a thin shoelace, being yelled at by his father. A dirty finger pointing at his face, shouting at him to look up at his eyes.

Will jerks out of this as soon as he can. Distracting himself with thoughts of today. Casting away the thoughts of his childhood. He moved to get away from those memories. Will thinks about the events of his shifts today. Will thinks of Hannibal. He thinks of Hannibal's jokes and the serial killer comment. Will smiles to himself as he gets under the covers. Thinking about how he wouldn't exactly mind if he was being serious. At least the guy planning to murder him was nice. At least he made a few jokes before killing him. At least he wasn't Dad.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

That irritating sound of Will's electric alarm beeping from the stack of boxes fashioned into a bedside table woke him up at 9AM. Five hours of sleep was honestly a record for him. Especially uninterrupted. His usual nightmares of his past didn't seem to bother him in his sleep. Perhaps they felt bad for him. Poor old Will. Just trying to make money so he can eat and sleep somewhere other than a homeless shelter. Of course Will knows nightmares don't just go away like that. They'll be back. Will can't wait of course.

His first class today is at 11AM, which gives him 75 minutes to get ready, the rest will be spent on the 40 minute bus journey to his campus. Believe it or not Will's apartment was the closest, affordable place to his university.

He starts to get out of bed. Walking out his room to discover the empty room ahead. His roommate must've had an early class today. Ruffling his unruly curls, pushing them back out of his eyes, he walks towards the bathroom. To 'lock' the door, he has to tie an elastic band to the door handle and a nail in the doorframe. Will and his roommate came up with this idea a few months back after walking in on each other showering one too many times.

Will's mind is cast back to last night, just before he fell asleep. He attempts to bury them back down as he strips off his clothes, discarding them on the cold, dirty tiles of the bathroom floor. It's still slightly damp beneath him. His roommate must've left more recently than Will first thought. Will avoids stepping on the cracks of the tiles, this time because they're filled with whatever grime the previous tenant couldn't be bothered to clean out.

He reaches to turn on the shower, silently praying that the hot water decided to work today. His fingertips grazed over the controls, sliding over the rusted silver tap. The red stripe to signal 'hot', well-faded from the acts of time. He lets the water run for a few seconds, awkwardly standing naked. Nobody can see him. Nobody can come in, yet still, it still feels wrong to simply stand naked with no intention other than well, standing there.

Without the distraction of doing simple tasks Will's mind wanders again. Running off to places he's already labelled as 'forbidden'. He deeply wishes that he could simply forget the face of his Father. Will already knows what to do with these thoughts. Knows what he *can* do to get his mind to return from these forbidden places. His school counsellor from when he was 14 tried to teach him a few techniques that are commonly used for 'people like him'. None of them ever worked. Breathing practices, counting to ten. Listing things you can see, hear and whatever the other senses are. Will didn't bother to remember irrelevant information. He only keeps what really matters in his 'mind palace'. He isn't so fond of a lot of the information his brain keeps, but still, it's all important somehow.

Will uses his own techniques to fetch his mind and set it straight. He thinks of something he can look forward to for today. However, the only thing his brain can seem to conjure up is a face. For once, it's not the dreaded face of the man who 'raised' him.

Instead, it's a pretty face. Handsome even. Strong facial structure with a slight stubble of facial hair. With eyes like he's never seen before.

Hannibal.

Will couldn't quite understand his own obsession with the man he met last night. He's sure it'll pass and the face will be forgotten within a few days - just like every other person he encounters. Somehow, deep down Will knew he was lying to himself. This face could not be so easily forgotten as the others.

A few minutes have passed now. Will reaches to feel the temperature of the water. Not quite freezing. Good enough. He climbs in the bathtub. The plughole is a small hole at the shower end, duct tape holding the side of the bathtub together to stop mice from getting in or out. Will's done his plenty share of getting underneath the bath to grab mice with his bare hands. He never had the heart to kill them. Could never bring himself to end a life. Too close to his childhood, remembering the time his Father took him out hunting.

The first and last time he did. Will went along with his Dad and his friends, out into the woods, wearing someone's old pair of hunting boots, taped up at the heel and toe, the laces non-existent, paired with his classic ripped, dirty jeans held up by a shoelace and an old shirt, too baggy for him. Will cried as soon as he heard the shot. He cried even more when he saw the animal. It wasn't even dead - which was somehow worse. It was suffering, unable to put itself out of its misery. The only thing that could do such a thing was the person who had caused the pain. One of his Dad's nicer friends took him back to the town after his Father yelled at him for 'not being a man' or something. Will wishes he could remember that friend's face. He was one of the only people Will trusted when he was younger. The friend was always kind to Will. Treating him better than his own Dad could ever. The friend didn't have any children of his own, so he was always happy to entertain Will. However, he never had the chance to see Will grow up into what he is now. He died in a bar fight when Will was 13. Nobody ever told Will what the fight was about, or who else it involved, however he always suspected it was his own Father, and something deep down also suspected Will may've been the subject of the argument that fueled the fight.

Now, whenever Will caught one of the mice that inhabited his bathroom, he'd run down the stairs and release it into the outside - which is probably why they keep coming back. But Will doesn't mind, anything is better than killing an animal, even if it does mean getting under a bathtub that probably has more diseases than Will has fingers.

The change of temperature in water snaps him out of his mind. The hot water officially running out, he decided now would be a good time to wash himself. Gripping the nearly empty bottle of cheap shower gel from poundland with his pale arms - blue and purple veins visible as a result of the cold water. He opens the bottle and rations the shower gel, using as little as possible to cover himself. He never stood close enough for someone to notice how he smells anyway, so why should it matter. Will wasn't unhygienic and he'd never received any complaints about his smell, so he never gave it much thought.

After a few more minutes in what could be classed as an ice bath, Will turned off the water and stepped out onto the cold tiles. Compared to what Will had just gone through, the tiles felt practically warm. Again, avoiding the cracks of the floor, Will swiped his towel off the

radiator. It was still slightly damp from the previous morning - however, slightly damp was always better than frozen. It was either that or no towel at all, and Will didn't feel too comfortable walking through his apartment naked, then going through his day in wet clothes. Perhaps in the summer, but definitely not when the weather is in minus numbers.
He wrapped the oddly stained towel around his waist, unhooked the rubber band off the nail in the doorframe and walked across the floor to his room. Closing the door behind him as he walked in on his tiptoes. The feeling of his wet feet on anything made him want to repeatedly smash his head into a brick wall. He dries himself to the best of his abilities with his already wet towel before dressing himself. Picking up his jeans from yesterday off the floor, the bottom of them somehow already caked in dirt on the second day of wearing them. He pulls them on over his underwear, which of course, has a few rips here and there. Same with his socks. They may have a few toes missing but they function as socks, and isn't that all their purpose is? Will looks at the boxes his clock stands on. 10:15AM. Will has 45 minutes before his class starts. Which means he has 5 minutes to be at a bus stop 10 minutes from his building.

He tugs on a flannel shirt and scoops his Dad's fishing coat off the floor. He grabs his tattered bag from the side of the door as he runs out his room. Pushing his feet into his timberlands, the pair of shoes scattered over the floor by the sofa. God only knows why past Will decided to make life so hard for present Will. It's going to be even worse for future Will when he misses his bus.

Pushing his feet into his boots as he walks out, struggling to lock the door behind him. At this point he's tempted to leave the door open. What would anyone steal? His precious microwave. On second thought, the microwave is one of the few things keeping Will alive right now with his instant-noodle diet so that would cause some issues. It's also probably the most expensive thing in that apartment so it would also create a few problems when trying to replace. Will finally shoves the key in the door and twists, he yanks the key out the hole and runs downstairs. Practically taking flight with the way he's running down them.

His sprint doesn't stop as he jumps down the last four steps. Running full speed at the door. Stopping only to pull it with strength he didn't even know he had. He didn't have time to check that the glass from the window had been cleaned up yet. A few holes in his feet wasn't his top priority at the minute. A bus that came every 50 minutes was. He'd have about 4 minutes to get to this bus stop. Will's sure he's done worse, but not in half wet clothes, dripping hair and feet so cold he's not sure if he left a few toes behind on the stairs.

Running at full speed, not caring who saw him he sprinted to the bus stop. He disregarded his 'no cracks' rule as he ran full speed down the pavement. This 5'8 man was not playing games. His throat burned from the frozen air, creating what felt like icicles forming in his throat. Will was sure he'd get some sort of illness from this stunt, but again, not exactly his top priority. He could see it now. The faded red of a bus stop. And what was that about to beat him? Of course. The fucking bus. This country boy was not letting a vehicle outrun him. It was as if someone had just switched his gear up to the next one. Will's legs ran faster than his Dad could ever get him to go. No amount of yelling and slurs could ever get him to speed up this much.

Just a few seconds before the bus arrived at the stop. Will did. Sticking out his arm to signal to the driver as he dug his other hand into his pocket to retrieve his card. Out of breath, he waited for the doors to open then stepped on to the practically empty bus. The driver smiled at him as he tapped his card. Walking to whatever seat was closest. One by the window. He sits his bag down next to him as he catches his breath. The warm air in the bus is like medicine to his throat - and to the rest of his body. The feeling in his feet is starting to return, and no pain is accompanying it which is good news. The broken glass didn't get him today. He still kept both hands buried into his pockets. Fiddling with the inside lining of his coat as he stared out the window, preparing for the half-hour journey. However, the traffic on the road implied that perhaps it'd take a little more than thirty minutes to get to class.

Will decided it wasn't worth stressing over. There was nothing he could do about it. More people got on his bus as his journey progressed, a few people complained that they had somewhere they needed to be to the bus driver - as if he was controlling the traffic. Will despised people like this. If you have a problem with something, keep it to yourself - especially when there's nothing you can do about it. Will preferred to limit social interaction to about zero, so seeing people publicly do something like that made him roll his eyes and pray that they get off soon. Clearly the only person who likes the sound of your voice is yourself. - Is what Will would say, if he was 6 '7 and jacked. However he's not. He's 5 '8 and pretty much the opposite of 'jacked'. So for now he'll keep his mouth shut.

The traffic cleared up towards the end of Will's journey, a few people getting off along with him, none of them seemed to run like him though. They probably planned their day out and had a class in 20 minutes instead of 2. The lecture was a forensic science one. He had to turn in an essay about some boring serial killer from 30 years ago. All he got from doing research on this guy was that he wasn't original, his techniques were cheesy, and that he got caught. Predictable guy really.

Will's distracted as his thoughts run over the essay. His lack of attention causes him to fall into something - or judging from the warmth and the drink spilling on him - someone. The scruffy man prepares for the worst, praying that it's not some high class business guy who's too pretentious to forgive a student for accidentally running into him. Lucky he looks at the man's well-tailored suit and discovers that the hot drink only managed to spill on Will. He's about to apologise then quickly run off when someone beats him to the apology.

"Deepest apologies, it seems as if I couldn't step out of your way in time."

Will recognises the foreign accent in an instant, he looks up to confirm his theory.

He's faced with those beautiful maroon eyes staring right back down at him. Will feels his face turn hot as he quickly faces back down. Replying to the man after realising he has yet to do so,

"Oh no, it's me, it's me who should be apologising. I wasn't looking who- at who might be in front of me. Sorry for making you spill your coffee- -look I could pay you back right now- I'm sure, I'm sure I have some loose change here somewhere.." Will digs around his pockets, panicking as he frantically searches for any kind of coins.

“No really it’s okay. I assure you. Infact, I was just on my way to throw it out now.” Hannibal replies, pointing towards a trash can behind Will.

“Really?” Will is surprised as to why someone would throw away a perfectly good cup of coffee. It wasn’t as if it had gone cold - Will had discovered this himself after a good amount of it burned through his coat and flannel.

“Well you see, it’s funny that we run into each other again. I was just thinking of you.” Hannibal says. Will can hear the smile in his voice as he focuses his eyes on the taller man’s cream-coloured suit. He doesn't say anything, surprised to find that the feeling of the other person running through their mind palace constantly had a small chance of being mutual.

The silence prompts Hannibal to finish what he was saying.

“This morning, I decided that with the free time I had today I’d treat myself to another one of the delicious coffees I had last night.”

Will finds himself blushing again from this comment, he hopes Hannibal assumes his red face is caused from the cold and not from his compliment.

“And so I picked one up just a few minutes ago. However I was immensely disappointed to discover the taste was exceptionally different. In a bad way, I must add.” Hannibal grimaced as he described the upsetting event.

Will smiled as he listened. He found it funny at just how displeased Hannibal was at the fact that his coffee tasted a little different to how it did when made by an entirely different person.

“Well the point is, I’ve discovered that it was the artist that truly made me appreciate the art.” Will heard the smile returning to Hannibal’s voice, he quickly glanced up to discover his smile mirrored the well dressed man.

They both laughed together as Will spoke.

“Well lucky for you, I’ve picked up another shift tonight for ten-thirty. I’ll hope to see you then, - Oh and trust me - I’ll make that black coffee the way it *should* be made.”

Hannibal hummed in agreement, a smile still present on his face - those sharp canines showing once again. He then sighs.

Will looks up again to see what the problem is - this time he doesn’t feel the urge to pull away from the eye-contact. No need to break something without a reason. He discovers Hannibal’s face of displeasure and is about to question it when once again, Hannibal seems to read exactly what he’s thinking and answers the question for him.

The taller man looks down at the new stains on Will’s coat.

“I truly do apologise for spilling such a distasteful drink on you. Is there any way I could make it up to you?”

Will feels his face grow hot once again as he looks to Hannibal's shoulder. Locking eyes whilst Hannibal said such a thing should be criminal. Will shouldn't think this way as Hannibal is trying to make something up to him - something that was definitely Will's fault. He decides replying as soon as possible would hopefully cover his reaction.

"Really, it's okay. The coat was old anyway - wasn't too expensive anyway."

"I insist, besides I enjoy conversing with you. I find you to be an interesting soul. I was actually hoping we'd meet again after our interaction last night."

The comment catches Will off guard, not expecting someone to actually be happy with his company, not expecting to ever meet someone who would willingly ask to hang out with him.

"Yeah okay- sure. Well, after this class I should- I should be free until about five."

Will suddenly remembers this class he's supposed to be at right now. He panics and looks around at the empty street. The only people around were him and Hannibal.

"Look I'm sorry I have a class that probably started two minutes ago that I'm supposed to be at - I should really head off now."

"Ah yes, apologies again. I'll take it that I'll meet you here in an hour?" Hannibal smiles hopefully at the younger man.

Will starts to walk off, still facing Hannibal.

"Will." He says, pushing his now dry, brown curls away from his eyes.

"I'm sorry?" Hannibal replies, eyes following Will's hand around his face.

"My name. Will."

Hannibal smiles as their eyes lock.

"Well. I'll see you in an hour's time. Will."

Will grins at Hannibal before rushing off to class.

Hannibal watches the figure of the shorter man run off. His curls flowing with the help of the cold wind. One hand in his pocket, the other gripping the still-hot coffee as he continues to stare at Will dashing to his class.

–Espior–

Will counts the steps as he rushes inside the campus. He walks into the lecture hall, keeping his head down, not bothering to look at anyone. He couldn't even describe the face of anyone

in the class, let alone name anyone. He attempts to make as little noise as possible as he climbs the side stairs, praying that nobody would notice him. He takes a seat towards the back and looks around. Nobody seems to be distracted, all of them focusing on whatever the professor is spouting.

10 minutes later, the professor is walking around the room, collecting the essays from students, Rambling about how important it is to research not only the past, but the present and the future.

He takes this time to unpack. Hanging his stained coat on the back of his chair, dragging his laptop out his bag along with the essay - placing it on the table and attempting to straighten out the crinkles with his calloused fingers. Luckily, the professor hasn't quite got to him yet, still yapping on about thoughts he should - in Will's opinion - keep to himself.

He thinks it's philosophical bullshit. Forensics is fact - things that have happened. Will thinks he'll stick to looking through books and scrolling through Wikipedia instead of building a time machine to see who's killing who in 18 years time. Hell, he doesn't want to know what's going on at all in 18 years. Knowing his luck he's probably in a dead end office job that has nothing to do with a degree in forensic science. No family. No wife. No kids. Living in a shitty, one bedroom apartment. He just can't wait.

Will listens to the professor drag on about some other bullshit that definitely doesn't have anything to do with what the class should really be taking notes on. He logs into his laptop, which is so old he's starting to wonder how it actually still works, and opens a new tab. He decides to look through slightly more recent, more interesting murders. What Will finds does not disappoint for once. Il mostro. The Monster of Florence. A case that went cold 7 years ago. The killer was last active in 1991. Will finds himself being sucked into his screen, completely ignoring the class. He truly wonders how he's passing at all with a professor like this, and when every class ends up with Will finding his own thing to do.

Will feels people around him start to move about, the hall becoming more and more empty. Eventually, he looks up to discover he's the only person in said hall. In a panic, he checks the clock on the wall and realises that the class officially ended 10 minutes ago. Great. He starts to pack up frantically, slamming down his laptop as it's shoved into the bag - Will notices the bottom is finally starting to give out, the rips in the old, green fabric more present than usual. He flung on his coat, then slipped the one, working, taped up strap of his bag over his shoulder. Hannibal was kind enough to ask him out even after-. Will slows his steps for a second. Was Hannibal asking him out? On a date? No. Someone like that wouldn't ask poor old Will out on a date - surely. Hannibal wore expensive suits, looked quite a bit older than Will and probably had the most beautiful girls clawing at those polished shoes. And as for Will. Well, for a start Will was a man. God only knows how his Father would react if he suddenly brought home a foreign, rich guy who appeared to look more like Will's sugar daddy than anything. He smiled at thought, pushing open the hall door and semi-running through the hallway. Now that would get a real rise out of his Dad. I mean - bringing home a guy, someone who he definitely couldn't continue the bloodline on with - that would be bad enough. But a guy like Hannibal? Now Will would *kill* to see the look on his face.
It was something nice to think about - but also something that Will could *only* think about. Let's face it. Will, in his opinion, was an average looking guy who was here on a scholarship

because he could barely afford to travel here on a plane that didn't look like it may blow up mid-flight. His greatest quality was that he could catch a *mean* fish. Will knew what he was. American trash. He'd grown used to accepting what others saw him as so it didn't really bother him. That really said enough.

Coat half on, bag about to fall apart at any second, he ran through the busy campus. Long, brown curls pushed back out of his eyes by the wind, thankfully he could see if he ran into someone this time. Will ran to the bus stop where they'd previously met, and surprisingly, he saw the figure of a tall man - waiting for someone by a trash can. Will smiled to himself, catching his breath the best he could as he started to slow down. Hannibal seemed to have seen him as well, as he started to walk over - hands in his pockets, protecting them from the cold air. As soon as they were in a close enough distance, Will instantly starts apologising - this scene seems familiar.

"Look again, I'm so- I'm sorry. I lost track of time in there whilst doing some research- -and well. That's my excuse. Look I'll- I'll buy you a coffee to make up for it.- And to make up for what happened earli-"

Hannibal pulls his hand out his pocket, signalling for Will to stop talking by putting it out in front of him.

"Like I said before Will - I was the one at fault - I shall be the one treating *you*. No need for you to apologise. I, myself, do occasionally get caught up in my own research. I find that time seems to stop whenever I dedicate time to something I'm passionate about."

Hannibal smiled politely as he spoke. It was a gentle smile, one that accentuated his already perfect cheekbones. Will couldn't help but stare. The fact Hannibal had remembered his name hadn't slipped his mind either. He was pleasantly surprised by this man once again.

Will nodded as a reply to Hannibal.

"Tell me Will, did you have a place in mind for us to go?"

Will panicked once again by the sudden question. Attempting to formulate an answer.

"Like I said, I guess we could just go get coffee or something - but I don't mind anything."

Hannibal looks down at Will's student ID hanging from a lanyard on his neck as he speaks. 'Will Graham'. The name isn't familiar at all - yet somehow - he feels as if he has met this 'Will Graham' before.

"After the incident earlier today, I must declare that I'd rather not drink another coffee if it is not made by your hands." Once again, Hannibal smiles as he speaks, attempting to catch Will's eye. It works. Their eyes lock for a second before Will brings his head back down, eyes frantically darting over the cracks of the pavement. He wonders if Hannibal knows what he's doing to him. After shutting down Will's idea, Hannibal replaces it with another - arguably much better - suggestion.

“Of course, I probably have something edible where I live. If you would be so kind as to accompany me home.”

Will doesn’t reply for a second, he thinks the comment makes him sound like some sort of cheap prostitute, but doesn’t dwell on that thought for too long. He doesn’t want it to feel like he’s intruding on Hannibal’s space - especially when he only met the man yesterday.

Will’s lack of response and doubtful expression prompts Hannibal to add:

“Really, if you’re up to it, I do insist. I verily enjoy catering for friends.”

Once again, the seemingly small comment doesn’t slip Will’s mind. Will had figured that Hannibal wasn’t ‘normal’ so he couldn’t be sure that Hannibal wasn’t adding in all these small comments because he wanted to get something out of Will. For some reason, Will decided not to think too much about it - perhaps because he simply didn’t care. Unlike the other ‘doctors’ from Will’s teenage years that tried to dissect Will’s mind, using unoriginal ‘manipulation’ tactics in an attempt to get something out of the young boy, Will didn’t mind Hannibal doing it - if that is what he’s doing of course. Will wasn’t sure yet, and he’d hate to put a judgement on someone like Hannibal so quickly.

“I mean, again it’s up to you of course- but yeah, sure I’d like that - if you don’t mind.”

Will didn’t especially want to visit wherever Hannibal lived. Usually if he didn’t want to do something, he’d simply say no. However, for some reason, Will couldn’t bring himself to shut Hannibal down. He hadn’t felt this type of anxiety in years. He wasn’t exactly ‘scared’, but he also wasn’t in a place he’d particularly call ‘comfortable’.

Hannibal somehow senses Will’s distressed state.

“And well, if you're worried about me being a serial killer, like we discussed, you seem to be quite experienced in that area so I'm sure you'll know how to handle me.”

This comment forces a small smile on Will’s face. The mood is somehow instantly lightened by a serial killer joke. This prompted Will’s mind to officially label Hannibal as ‘potential friend’. A label that was rarely used by his mind. A title only given to very few.

Hannibal takes the lead, walking the way Will came. The scruffy man followed, walking not quite behind, but not quite next to him. Hannibal slows his long strides - whether it's intentional or not, Will’s not sure - forcing Will to walk beside the taller man. Will felt slightly out of place next to him, he looked practically homeless in his second hand, stained clothes, next to Mr ‘matching-three-piece-suit-with-a-fancy-tie’ Hannibal.

They walk in an oddly comfortable silence for about five minutes until Hannibal comes to a stop beside the road. Will is ready to cross the road, perhaps to get to whatever bus or train station leads to Hannibal’s place. But no. Hannibal pulls a set of keys out his blazer pocket, pushing down a button. Will watches the headlights of the car in front of them flash, and listens for a small ‘click’. The taller man then moves towards the car, reaching to open the passenger door.

Will briefly takes in the classy sedan. A black, shiny Rolls-Royce, somehow so clean - it's more of a mirror than the one in Will's bathroom. It has a beautiful traditional design, the silver accents giving the same contrast of Hannibal's well-styled suit.

Hannibal smiles and nods his head at Will, signalling for him to get in.

"Thanks." - Is all Will can muster up as he climbs into the seat. Hannibal smiles at the scruffy man's awkward politeness.

The white leather was plush and cold beneath Will's fingertips. He briefly brings his attention to the interior of the luxury car. It was the kind Will had seen in old mafia-style movies his Dad used to watch on the beaten up TV. Will wouldn't mind waking up from the dream right now - the day has fulfilled him enough already. Whatever's to come is simply an added bonus.

After a few seconds, Hannibal sits down next to Will, pushing the keys in and starting the engine. However, they don't seem to go anywhere. Hannibal looks as if he's remembered something important, so Will prepared himself. Like he thought, the dream was going to end eventually. Hannibal was going to come up with some excuse - 'I've just remembered I have an important errand to run' or 'It seems 'I've forgotten about the plans I had to see an old friend today'.

But that doesn't happen. Instead, Hannibal reaches into the backseat to retrieve something. When his hands return into view, Will discovers he's holding an expensive-looking flat, white box, wrapped in a taupe coloured ribbon - tied in a professional manner into a bow.

Hannibal's eyes met with Will's as he handed him the white box.

"If it's not your size, please do say."

Will was confused, but something prompted him to undo the beautifully tied ribbon and open the white box. Inside was a fishing coat. Brand new, made from expensive-feeling materials and in a size small. - Which embarrassingly, Hannibal had correctly guessed. Will rubbed the material of the sleeves back and forth on his fingertips.

"Hannibal, this- how much-, how much was this?"

Hannibal gives him that smile again, his vampiric teeth pressing against his bottom lip.

"Well, I didn't have much on my schedule during the hour you were busy. So whilst I was taking a walk through the town, I saw this in a window display. It reminded me of the coat you wore - the one that I ruined. So I thought you may enjoy it - do you?"

Will was amazed at the fact Hannibal could 'window shop'. What kind of fortune was this man hiding?

"Yes- yes of course I do. It's- wow, really Hannibal thank you so much."

Will looked up from the coat, taking in Hannibal's expression as he thanked him. They had barely known each other for a day, their friendship stemming from shitty coffee and serial

killer jokes. But for some reason, they looked at eachother like old friends, joking together after years of knowing the other.

“It makes me glad to see you’re fond of it. Once again, I apologise for the incident at the bus stop.” Hannibal sighed.

Will laughed softly at the handsome man’s distress.

“Really, after all this - you need to stop apologising. I feel like you’ve done so much for something that was barely your fault.”

“It was I, who spilt his disgusting beverage on you. Therefore, I’m at fault.”

“Really Hannibal you don-”

“I didn’t apologise, I simply stated what events went down.” Hannibal stated, matter-of-factly.

Will laughed at Hannibal's stubbornness as the car began to pull out.

“Now I’ve just got to ask Hannibal - and sorry if I’m intruding,”

Hannibal’s eyebrows arch in curiosity, waiting for Will’s question.

“This really is a stunning car - beautiful even - but how on earth can you afford it?”

Hannibal lets out a smile and chuckles at Will’s curiosity.

“I appreciate your compliments on my vehicle. As for your query - I must admit I do not work a full time job, instead I’m a medical student, currently in my fifth year. I’m studying to become a surgeon. I do however, have several investments in a few countries of which I have travelled to. But once again, that isn’t all. - ”

Will takes in the scenery as they drive, listening to Hannibal’s soft, accented voice. Upper class London feels like an entirely new city. Tall, white brick buildings decorated with black fences and pillars. Complex architecture on what could be a simple townhouse. It’s beautiful.

“- I was born into wealth. I inherited my parent’s fortune after turning 18 years old, just 8 years ago, using a small amount of the money to travel. I did however get into school on a scholarship, that is something I’m quite proud of.”

“And you should be, medical school huh? If I’m being completely honest with you - I thought you were at least in your thirties.” Will panics, realising what he’s just said is terribly rude.

“I mean- the way you dress, you know? All fancy and expensive. -And, and the way speak - All fancy and refined” Will pauses for a second, hanging his head low. “Shit I’m sorry, that sounded as if I just called you old - which I did - but- well..-”

Hannibal laughed.

Will was intrigued by this man. Instead of being offended that someone he barely knew - someone of clearly much lower status than him - called him old, he laughed? Will is confused by the handsome, no-longer-stranger. He isn't the stuck up, rich, upper class man that he was expecting. Instead he speaks in a strange way, his accent making the words he says sound soft, even if he is talking about how he inherited a fortune - with the implication of both of his parents' deaths. With the thought of Hannibal's accent Will asks another question.

"I have to ask, it's been bugging me to be honest, where are you from?"

Hannibal doesn't seem to mind such a forward question. In fact, he much prefers it to the people who dance around the subject as if Hannibal would throw a fit over someone being curious about his background. He decided to give Will the same answer he gives most people.

"Guess."

Will is taken aback for a second, but then smiles as he ponders the answer. He replays the soft way Hannibal speaks back in his mind. Studying the man's accent before replying.

"Lithuanian?"

Will asks it as a question, even though he knows he's correct.

Hannibal takes his eyes off the road for a second to look at Will.

"Clever boy. -"

For some reason, the comment sparks something inside Will. He shifts in the leather seat, smiling to himself - looking out the window in an attempt to cover his reddening face.

"-most people leave without ever finding out the correct answer, let alone anyone getting it on the first try."

Will feels a small sense of pride knowing this information, and he's not sure why.

"Now," Will looks over to Hannibal as the older man starts to speak. "I think it's only fair that I be allowed to ask a few of my own questions."

Will is shocked once again by Hannibal. Someone is going to willingly listen to Will talk about himself. And Will doesn't even have to pay them!

"Yeah of course, ask away." Will replied cheerfully. Tapping his fingers into the fabric of his new coat, along to the beat of a rolling stones song playing quietly on the car's radio.

"What prompted you to study so far away from home, or did your family move here recently?" Hannibal's question was straightforward. Approaching the topic head one, just how a question should be asked.

"Well, I'm from the American countryside, just me and my Dad out there." Will surprises himself at just how quickly he's opening up. "I prefer to mask the accent though, lotta people

round' here think it's obnoxious, and to be fair, I can agree with them."

Hannibal frowns slightly at Will's answer.

"Why do you think you feel that way?"

Will laughs slightly, sighing at the same time.

"God you're starting to sound a whole lot like my therapist from high school."

In an attempt to laugh it off, Hannibal chuckles slightly, apologising for bringing back an old memory. He decides not to push, staying curious, not wanting to bring anything else that Will may consider 'unpleasant' back up.

Hannibal decided to continue the conversation, enjoying speaking with the younger man.

"America. Funnily enough I've never visited there. Tell me Will, how was it there?"

Will studies his mind for a way to respond without saying 'Shitty. Don't bother.' Instead, his Father comes to mind, somehow plaguing the inner workings of Will even at such a positive time.

"Well, I lived in a small town with my Father from the age of about 12, never really went anywhere else. First time I ever left was to fly here."

Hannibal stays silent, nodding, letting Will speak about himself - something he's gathered the curly-haired boy has no experience in.

"Me and my Dad never exactly saw eye-to-eye. So we didn't speak often. He was just the man I lived with, really. I spent most days staying behind at school in the library, always wanted to move away - so I figured getting a scholarship somewhere far would be the best excuse."
Will continues to look out the window whilst speaking. His hands still occupy the fabric of the fishing coat.
"On the days I couldn't go to school I spent my time running about with the local strays, they were my only friends really - bit sad now that I'm saying that out loud."
Will laughed awkwardly at his comment. Embarrassed by just how much he was telling Hannibal. Why *was* so easy for him to open up to this man?

Hannibal speaks for the first in a few minutes, eyes still on the road.

"Sometimes the company of animals can be more fulfilling than that of a person."

Will is silent. His head jerks away from the window to face Hannibal. He comes to a sudden realisation. Hannibal understands him. For his whole life, people have looked at Will as if he was speaking a made-up language. But now - for the first time - someone has entered Will's life, speaking in Will's native tongue. Will looks back down into his hands.

Hannibal takes in the information Will had just given him - bookmarking it as 'important', something he can use for future references. Something he hopes to add to. He hopes to add a

lot more under the section labelled ‘Will’. Intrigued by the scruffy man sat next to him. Hannibal notices Will’s fingers running over the fabric of his new coat. Gripping it slightly, as if someone was going to rip the gift from him. It didn’t take a genius to infer that this was possibly a result of Will’s childhood. Probably something to do with Will’s Father.

The car finally pulls into an underground parking lot. Hannibal’s fingers sliding smoothly over the leather covered steering wheel. He reverses into a space in the middle of two other cars.

Will’s eyes dart around the dark setting, spotting other cars that look equally, if not, more expensive than Hannibal’s. The car eventually comes to a stop. Still holding his gift, Will opens the car door in sync with Hannibal. Both of them shutting them then walking towards each other. Hannibal clicks the keys, the headlights flash once again and the car locks.

Hannibal takes the lead, smiling at Will as he slows down for the younger man - letting him catch up. They head over to an elevator, not needing to wait as it was already at their level.

The two men walk into the enclosed space. Hannibal reaches out to press the last button on the wall. Floor 60. Will watches his hand, attempting to hide his shocked demeanour after finding out that the man who’s invited him out for lunch lives in the penthouse suite of a luxury building.

The small notion unfortunately doesn’t go unnoticed by the older man. Hannibal hears the small change in Will’s breath as he pushes the button. Quickly glancing down at the younger man. However he’s pleasantly surprised to discover something he’s not sure how he didn’t notice. Will has small holes in his ear. The thought of the man having a rebellious phase in his teenage years makes Hannibal smile. He can’t imagine Will ‘flannel-shirts-blue-jeans-with-a-fishing-coat’ Graham as much of a punk. Perhaps one day he’ll ask if he could see a picture. He continues to study the strange man, discovering something else as well. His smile quickly fades as he notices the small scar towards the back of Will’s neck, practically covered by a mop of curly brown hair. Split ends present - an indication of just how ‘recent’ Will’s last haircut was.

Hannibal’s staring doesn’t go unnoticed. Not noticing what he was looking at, Will gives him a small smile. Hannibal nearly forgets to react as he watches the face of the scruffy man.

Hannibal notices just how special his features are. Clean face, unkempt eyebrows, a tint of blush covering his smooth; clear skin and those blue eyes. A blue comparable to a clear sky as the sun is about to set. Hannibal had yet to make proper eye contact with Will, however he isn't sure how he didn’t notice such unique beauty. Really, Will Graham was like the only true piece of art in a museum of fakes.

A few minutes after they stepped into the small space, the metal doors slid open - signalling their arrival at Hannibal’s floor. Will couldn’t imagine having to wait over a minute to get to his room - *in a lift* -. He couldn’t even start to think about the stairs.

Hannibal walks out first, Will tailing close behind as he watches the taller man bring out a different set of keys. He slides them into the keyhole without any resistance - oh how Will would’ve killed for that this morning.

He follows Hannibal into his apartment, sorry, *penthouse*. Hannibal steps to the side as Will takes a few steps in, locking the door behind them, setting the keys down onto a table by the door. Will's eyes take in the dark wooden flooring beneath his banged up shoes - taking no notice of the left shoelace being undone. He lifts his head up and stands in shock for a moment. He's only ever seen these sorts of places in the old movies he used to watch over his Dad's shoulder on their ancient TV.

Hannibal places a hand on Will's shoulder to remove his coat.

Will flinches away from the unexpected touch, but quickly apologises for his quick movement.

"Sorry 'bout that." Will tried to laugh it off. "Just got out of it for a second. Didn't expect you."

Hannibal smiles at him, his eyes understanding.
"I must apologise as well, I should've asked before reaching to hang up your coat, that was rude of me. Would it be okay for me to wash it, I do still feel responsible for the stain."

Will is silent for a moment, thinking to himself. Hannibal is patient. Will takes it off as he speaks.
"You could probably just chuck it in the trash. Didn't quite fit me right, falling apart and always had a weird smell I could never seem to get out."

"If that's what you wish for, I'm happy to help." Hannibal gives that smile that Will has quickly grown so fond of. He folds the coat after taking it from Will's hands. Placing it next to the table by the door.

Hannibal takes the lead again, Will following him inside this huge penthouse. Will didn't even want to know how much it was worth. It'd only make him feel bad for stepping inside it. He took in the details of the place as they walked through. Everything was chosen to fit where it lived perfectly. Will noticed a small stag statue as he walked through yet another hallway, only catching a glimpse of the reflective black sculpture.

Eventually they enter a kitchen. Will's eyes dart excitedly around the room. It was like an episode of masterchef. Steel appliances, a huge, industrial fridge - and an oven so big Will wonders if you could fit a human in there.

Hannibal stood behind Will, watching with pride as his new friend stared in awe at one of Hannibal's most prized possessions. He was glad Will knew how to appreciate true beauty at first sight - just like Hannibal. His most recent piece of interest standing in front of him in his kitchen as he moved to fetch Will a drink.

By the time Hannibal comes back with a glass of whisky, another one filled with red wine, Will is seated on a stool facing the main area of the kitchen. The taller man placed the small glass of whisky on the counter in front of Will, then placed the glass of whine on the side of the counter closer to him as he stood opposite Will.

Will watched as Hannibal reached into the large fridge, pulling out a few ingredients as they conversed over small topics. He watched intensely as Hannibal placed his blazer over a chair in the corner of the room. The taller man rolled up the slightly pink sleeves of his button down shirt - in that moment Will's heart did that strange thing again. The same feeling he got after Hannibal called him 'Clever boy'. Will's not sure why his body's doing this - and he's not sure he wants to find out. He distracts himself from Hannibal's veiny arms - but they weren't veiny in the same way Will's were after getting out of a cold shower. They were veiny in a sort of attractive way? He inspected Hannibal's arms just once more. Taking in the tan muscle as water from the sink splashes onto them.

Will darts his eyes to Hannibal's tie. Desperate for some sort of distraction, he can't be getting all worked up over a man's arms whilst trying to speak to him. The poor guy is just trying to live his life. Instead, Will focused on the rest of Hannibal - his clothes. The way the slightly off-white cream colour blended so well with the seemingly invisible pink stripes. The brown patterned tie - the way it clashes so perfectly with the bright colours of the waistcoat and slacks. Now, on second thought, perhaps Will could cross 'being a man' off his list of reasons why Hannibal would never ask him out. If Hannibal had a girlfriend - surely he'd just out dress her every time right? Will smiles to himself at the thought.

He's snapped out of Hannibal-infused daze by the man himself - asking for food preferences or something?

"I'm not too picky, grew up eating anything that was edible - couldn't afford to be too fussy."

Hannibal smiled at Will's answer, eyes still focused on whatever he was preparing on the counter.
"Understandable. I was planning to prepare Kudal. It's a South Indian curry dish, made with lamb intestine."

The thought of eating an animal's intestine does make Will want to gag a little, however, like he said - can't afford to be fussy sometimes. Hannibal had so kindly offered to home-cook a dish for Will. And Will couldn't remember the last time he'd eaten a home-cooked meal. Not counting microwave instant noodles of course.

"Sounds good to me. Like I said, I'll eat practically anything edible." Will replies with a smile, taking a small sip of his whisky. Careful to savour it - he didn't know whether he'd be able to enjoy something so expensive ever again - better make the most of it.

Hannibal nods as a reply as he washes his hands off, then moves to complete a new task.

"Do enlighten me Will, what is it you are studying at your university?"

Hannibal's eyes match Will's as he asks the question.

"Forensic science. Always had a sort of weird interest with crime you know. I remember my Dad's friend once gave me a box of his old comics. I got real attached to this crime drama series. Thought the detective was the coolest guy to exist." Will reminisced on the good memory.
"My Dad always found it pretty weird though. Called my interest in such a morbid subject

'distasteful' - which was probably the biggest word I've ever heard him manage to string together."

Hannibal laughed at Will's comment. He could tell that Will's father clearly wasn't one he'd ever gotten along with - which was fair in Hannibal's opinion.

Will continues to speak, filling the silence along with the sound of Hannibal slicing something.

"I guess I've always had a weird interest in serial killers really. -Not those generic ones. I mean the ones you gotta dig deep to find stuff on, you know?" Again, Will wasn't so sure as to how these words were just falling from his mouth so easily, but Hannibal doesn't seem so bothered about it - so he continued.

"I love researching the really unique bastards. The ones who elevate their kills to art-."

Will stops. Praying that Hannibal hadn't actually been listening. That'd he'd just been pretending.

"Sorry. I'm talking a whole lot about myself here, you only asked one question."

Hannibal continues what he's doing by a boiling pot of water, turning his neck to face Will.

"Really, I enjoy conversing with you - or to just hear what you have to say. I must admit I find you interesting, Will."

Will wants to reply, wants to say something back. Wants to tell Hannibal that he too, finds him to be the most interesting person he's ever met. But he decides that perhaps now isn't exactly the time. Will knows he's never been the best at 'reading' other people. So it's too early to tell if Hannibal is being truthful right now. Even so, all he wants is to speak to Hannibal properly. To speak in their language once again - even for just a second.

Chapter End Notes

In this chapter, Will Graham bursts out into song - singing 'Good morning Baltimore' from the 'Hairspray' soundtrack. This is his design.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will's eyes followed Hannibal from where he sat at the man's dining table. The taller man strutted in proudly, smiling as he placed an intricately designed, china plate, holding the food Will had watched him prepare, down in front of Will, then next to him at the head of the table. Whatever was on that dish, was like nothing the shorter man had smelt before. During the small events where Will had attempted to use an oven - the room of his apartment always smelt as if somebody had died. This however - definitely didn't smell like a corpse. And if it was - Will decided it was going to be the best tasting corpse he would ever eat.

Hannibal takes his seat at the end of the table as Will begins to speak.

"Really Hannibal, I can't even begin to thank you for today. First you buy me a whole new coat - and now cooking an entire meal?" Will gestures to his plate. "Seriously, I can't even remember the last time I ate something that wasn't from the Tesco 'reduced section' or something you have to heat up in a microwave."

Hannibal smiles towards Will's enthusiasm for the meal, however hides his discomfort at the thought of Will feeding himself something so disgusting. He decides to push away the feeling, deciding that all that currently mattered was the present - and in the present time, Will was eating something Hannibal had curated. So right now, he didn't need to worry.

"As I said Will, I greatly enjoy your company. And I was going to eat this for my lunch today either way - I just had a few extra ingredients that could be used to make an extra portion. In fact, I would have probably thrown those extra ingredients out. So really - you've helped nothing go to waste."

Hannibal picked up his utensils, beginning to eat as he finished what he was saying. Realising that Will wasn't going to start without Hannibal taking a bite before him - again a possible habit from childhood that Hannibal jots down in his mind.

Hannibal takes a sip from the wine glass in front of him, tilting his head down slightly to glance at Will. Thankfully, the scruffy man had begun to eat. He had a look on his face, the same one a starved child may have after being fed something fulfilling.

Will knew he was right about the whole 'best-tasting-corpse' thing. Well, more like best tasting lamb but that's besides the point. He'd eaten lamb with his Dad a few times after he'd gone out hunting. Will remembers the burnt tasting edges, the dry, flavourless meat that was still somehow undercooked. This was nothing like it. Whatever Will was currently putting in his mouth, was perfection. He'd never understood why food critics always had such strong opinions - food was food. It was either edible or not. Good or bad. This was different though. Hannibal's cooking was unlike anything Will had eaten before. Unlike anything he'd seen on Masterchef or on the cover of a food magazine. 'Good' wasn't a word that had the capacity to describe it.

Hannibal took Will's silence as a compliment. He was happy to see him so willing to eat Hannibal's creation. Will was a small man. Possibly underweight, just a little under the average height for an American male. Hannibal understood this was a possible result of childhood malnutrition - he'll have to see if his campus library has a book on the subject.

"So, you said you needed to be gone by four o'clock - may I ask why?" Hannibal questioned, in between mouthfuls.

Will swallowed the small amount of whisky in his mouth.

"Nothing interesting, just that I have another lecture around that time."

"I see." Hannibal pondered for a moment, his hands still as he wondered about something.

He looked back to the younger man before speaking.

"Would you prefer if I were to drop you off at your university?" Hannibal asked - then quickly added - "I assume it'd take quite a long time to get from here to there by bus, which would mean you'd have to leave here quite soon. I'd hate for you to have to leave without finishing your meal."

In a way, Hannibal's question sounded somewhat like a threat to Will. But Will reminded himself he'd never been too good at understanding people's tones. Hannibal did have that sort of 'villainous' face that the criminals in Will's crime drama comics had, but Will ignored that thought. He couldn't judge someone's entire person off a fictional series.

"No, it's fine, really. You've already done so much for me today - I couldn't dream of asking you to do something else for me."

"I must insist, in fact going that way anyway. It'd be a waste if I weren't to drop you off on the way to my destination." Hannibal replies with a small smile.

Once again, this feels like a threat. Maybe Will is just tired, or maybe it's the fact Will hasn't had a genuine human conversation in years. He had to remind himself that Hannibal is like no other person Will has met. That's quite evident already.

Will reconsiders his answer, deciding that if Hannibal was already planning to go into town, he wouldn't be wasting any of his time to drop Will off at his campus - with it being in walking distance of the main highstreet and everything. After weighing out his choices, that if which being: walk 20 minutes in the freezing cold for a bus stop he's not even sure actually exists; then travel another 20 minutes on said bus - surrounded by mouth breathing idiots with no idea of social etiquette or Will could spend another hour with Hannibal, then drive 20 minutes in his fancy, heated car directly to Will's campus. Will decided the second option seems a little more enjoyable.

Hannibal smiles as he finishes his meal, hearing Will agreeing to his suggestion. Of course, Hannibal doesn't actually need to go into town - he just wants to spend those extra minutes with Will. Because, well, who wouldn't? Hannibal could understand after just a few hours of interacting with him that he didn't have many friends. Will clearly lacked knowledge of

social cues, how to answer simple questions during a casual conversation and had a general nervousness when speaking. Hannibal thought it was safe to assume Will was different. He did of course catch the older man's eye, of course wasn't a simple man. However, Hannibal also believed it was safe to assume Will was somewhere on the spectrum - probably without diagnosis.

He sips his wine whilst he thinks about it. Perhaps he should study some parts of psychology. Will was a unique cocktail of personality disorders and neuroses, making him the perfect person in Hannibal's eyes. It was far too soon to judge, but Will had potential. He had the potential to experience his own becoming - and for it to be *beautiful*.

Soon enough, Will finishes his food. He places his cutlery together in the middle of the plate after a quick glance at Hannibal, noticing him do the same.

They sit in silence for a short while, a comfortable one like usual.

Hannibal is the first to break it.

"You study forensic science- correct?"

Will finishes the last sip of whiskey, placing the glass gently down on the table.

"Mm, yep."

"Tell me, is there anything interesting going on at the moment - that of which you can disclose of course." Hannibal smiles at the last part. "Wouldn't want to push you to release private information, detective."

Will laughs at Hannibal's joke, smiling coming so easily.

"Not exactly. Teacher's pretty shit if i'm being completely honest - can't stand him."

Hannibal glances down at the red liquid in the round glass in his hands, smiling to himself at Will's rude comment about his professor.

Hannibal doesn't interrupt, doesn't ask any questions. So Will sees this as an indication to continue.

"He gets all philosophical and shit, yapping about things that have no relation to what we really should be doing. I might as well not show up to half the lectures. I end up doing my own research ninety percent of the time. The other ten percent is just shit I already knew. Really, there's no point in me taking this class." Will's facial expressions change with what he says. Eyes avoiding Hannibal's, instead fixing on Hannibal's hands. Intentionally or not - Hannibal doesn't mind.

Will continues, barely taking a breath.

"I've always really wanted to go into something like being a crime scene investigator. But now I'm considering that maybe it's not gonna work out - I mean, how am I gonna graduate

without actually knowing anything? Really, I've started considering becoming an officer or something. Might go enrol myself at an FBI academy."

Hannibal dislikes the idea of that, he doesn't let the frown on his face hide it. The thought of Will being injured in the line of duty for some reason makes his insides hurt. He'd much prefer Will to be at the crime scene *after* everything has gone down.

"You must go with what your heart desires. That's what I've always told myself."

Will tilts his head slightly and smiles as he replies.

"Is that what you're doing, following your dreams?"

"You could say that. I guess I've always enjoyed the idea of helping those who can't themselves."

"Most people do. Not all act on it."

The two men lock eyes and catch each other's smile. They were speaking their own language again.

Will let the silence sit for a moment before speaking again. He wanted to carry on a conversation with Hannibal, apparently that's what you do with friends.

"And how difficult is it for you to achieve this dream?"

"I have two years left of my course. Part of me is excited to finally be free from the long hours of studying. But the other half of me is reminding myself that those long hours are just going to be spent actually performing the things I studied."

"I could never be a surgeon. Can't even imagine the stress of another human's life on my hands."

"But isn't that what happens as a crime scene investigator? Assess the situation incorrectly, the killer isn't caught, their next victims' blood being technically on your hands."

"Technically. It's less direct than someone dying on a table in your hands."

"With that logic, both of our kills are technical. Unless done with intent by our own hands - we aren't responsible."

"My logic may be flawed, but it's what helps me sleep at night I guess."

"Sleep is important, of course."

"Whatever you say doctor."

Hannibal laughs softly at Will's last comment. Getting up and reaching for his and Will's plates.

Noticing what Hannibal's doing, Will picks up their glasses and follows the older man as he starts to make his way back to the kitchen.

Will places both glasses on the counter by the sink where Hannibal is washing the plates. Will begins to rinse out his own glass alongside the taller man.

"Will, I must insist - as my guest - that you let me clean up after us."

"Really I'd just feel awkward after making you do everything, it makes me feel like I've contributed somehow if I do this." Will sighs.

"Well, as long as you don't mind. Neither do I."

Hannibal smiles and dries off his hands using a cloth hanging from the underside of a cabinet.

He walks over to a radio sitting idly in the corner of the room - on a table along with a lamp and a few recipe books. All books had many organised coloured tabs sticking out the sides of the pages. Will could only assume that the colours had different meanings. Hannibal was in school just like him, probably had a way busier schedule, and still had his life in such a better state than Will. He couldn't help but feel a tinge of jealousy.

Will watched over his shoulder, the warm water still splashing over his hands - something he rarely got to enjoy. He watched as Hannibal switched the radio on, turning one of the dials in an attempt to find a working channel.

Eventually, Killer Queen by Queen starts playing. Hannibal meets Will's eyes as he turns back to the sink.

"You know this one?" Hannibal asks, seeing Will's smile.

"You don't?"

"I believe the 70s produced the best music, so yes. I am quite fond of this band."

"Queen's great, that's one of the few things I enjoy here. The music. I adored Aerosmith as a kid, so finding out that they weren't the only band ever to have the idea of using something other than an acoustic guitar and a pair of spoons was like hitting oil."

"Aerosmith.. The name is familiar, I'll have to see if I own any of their material later."

"Doubt you do, wouldn't really say they're your style. It'll really shock me if you do." Will laughs at the thought of the well dressed man humming along to the song 'Eat The Rich'. The irony amuses him more than it probably should.

Hannibal must admit to himself that he'd never heard of an 'Aerosmith', but judging from Will's not-so-hidden giggles, they must be some sort of country band. Especially if they were a band from Will's childhood. He decided he'd have to look them up later.

They wash up together, and Hannibal's glad he agreed to let Will help him. He realises how much more comfortable the younger man has become in such a short amount of time. They

lightly brush against each other in the small space in front of the sink. Will's worn, blue flannel shirt felt strangely soft on Hannibal's arms. It was unlike the clothes he wore. Comfortable and casual. Not something that Hannibal would personally choose to wear, but he could admit that it suited Will. Of course, he wouldn't pass up the opportunity to see the shorter man all dressed up.

Hannibal sneaks a look at Will's frame as he imagines it. He'd get it custom made of course. Hire a private tailor. Will would never have to wear something ill-fitting ever again.

Will enjoys the silence of the moment. Pretending to not notice Hannibal obvious looks at him. He wasn't sure why the older man was trying to secretly look at him, but in the hopes that he wouldn't stop, Will didn't say anything.

The sound of Queen playing quietly in the background of the room was comforting. It felt domestic. Like something Will had missed out on for the past 20 years.

The two men clean up together, Will occasionally asking where something belongs in Hannibal's organised kitchen. Every time, Hannibal would show Will to the item's place, then explain why. Soon enough, Will could half-guess where something would go.

The cabinets and cupboards were filled with different kinds of utensils, - some of them looking a little too close to mediaeval torture devices - different spices, glasses of every size Will could think of. And of course the fridge. That industrial size fridge. Will nearly had to ask Hannibal to open it for him when he first tried to put away half an onion. When he finally did get it open - with just a small struggle of course - Will didn't know why the contents surprised him.

It was filled with all kinds of exotic ingredients, but what really caught Will's eye were the top two shelves. There were all kinds of cuts of meat. Will had never been much of a chef, so he couldn't exactly make out what any of the meat was. He was more of a fish guy, that being the only thing he ever really ate with his Dad - he preferred to not eat his Father's 'kills' whenever he got the chance - and from what Will could see, there was no fish.

As they finish up, Hannibal picks up his watch from where he left his blazer.

"I suspect if you don't want to run for this lecture, we should probably leave soon."

Will checks the clock on the kitchen wall. 3:35pm.

"Seems you're right, thanks again for giving me a lift."

"You're very welcome again Will."

Will follows Hannibal through the rooms, to the front door.

Hannibal enjoys the sound of Will's shoes on the hardwood floor. People who usually visit his home wear very different shoes. Stiletto heels that scrape the varnish off, expensive and detailed shoes that track dirt in because they aren't meant for outside wear - which some people clearly can't seem to wrap their head around.

But Will's shoes are worn down, not clean but not dirty. They don't track dirt in and the souls don't mark Hannibal's flooring.

Will's whole 'fisherman' look was quite charming on a man his age in Hannibal's opinion.

They're at the door, Hannibal slipping his arms through a long, black Giorgio Spina coat, whilst Will carefully puts on his new coat. He's careful with the material on his skin, feeling the hem of the sleeves with his fingers as if it was going to break under his touch.

Hannibal watches Will with amusement, with further inspection, Hannibal could confirm that Will's dress sense wasn't the only thing he found charming.

The scruffy man was very different from other people he'd met. He'd gotten used to people attempting to impress Hannibal in everything they did. Or taking every moment of his time as a chance to seduce him. It sometimes got quite tiring. Hannibal didn't care if that sounded selfish. It was true. He wanted to make a real, human connection. One that wasn't built on status or more specifically - Hannibal's status. He understood he was a desirable man. The ideal husband. Well dressed, wealthy, he could cook, studied at a very prestigious university and was exceptionally well mannered. But that's just how others saw him. Of course, Hannibal *was* in fact all those things. But he was also more.

Until now, Hannibal suspected no one would be able to see that. Under the 'perfect husband' facade, was a monster. He'd always dreamed of being able to openly take off his person suit in front of someone and now, he may just be able to follow those dreams. Hannibal had always chased for the things he desired in life, sure that he could get them. He was right. However, he'd now found something that he truly desired. Someone his heart desired. And he'd be damned if he didn't manage to get it. Even if that someone was an American man, 6 years younger than himself, who dressed like he was in a fishing documentary made for the elderly.

"Will, I must ask before I forget - could I get your phone number - Or perhaps any way that I'd be able to contact you?"

Will seemed to be caught off guard from this question. Or at least quite surprised.

"Oh, er- no, sorry. It's not that- If I had a phone then of course I'd give you the number. I've just never had any reason to get one. Wouldn't know how to use it anyway. Sorry."

"That's quite alright, perhaps I could get your address instead. So I could send over a bird to deliver letters?"

Will's laughs at Hannibal's comment for a moment, then looks at his face. Hannibal is smiling expectantly, as if he's waiting.

"Oh. Oh you're serious?" Will says as he goes to search his pockets for a pen, then realises they're completely empty - this time not because everything has fallen through to the lining.

Hannibal starts to move, finding a pen in one of the coats hanging up.

“Well yes, about the address - although if pigeon is your preferred use of communication then I’d be happy to oblige.”

Will tears off a piece of paper from his notebook in his bag as Hannibal hands him a pen.

They both laugh at the idea, although Will is close to believing Hannibal isn’t exactly joking.

He hands the small piece of paper to Hannibal. Their fingers brushing in the same way they did last night at the coffee shop.

Will is once again telling himself to stop thinking about everything so much. He’s never had friends before, so he can’t keep assuming that everything that happens is something that should happen between two people who are more than just friends. Especially since he’s never been in either situation.

“After you.” Hannibal says in a mockingly more polite tone than usual as he opens the door.

“Why thank you.” Will replies in the same tone.

Their eyes meet after Hannibal follows Will through, locking the door behind him.

The moment they looked away from each other, both walking towards the elevator doors, a smile graced both men’s faces. For some reason, they both knew the man next to them was going to be somewhat important. A personality like that was, of course, difficult to forget.

The two men wait side by side, close, but not quite touching.

Eventually, the elevator makes its way up to the final floor and they get in. Hannibal letting Will go first again, of course.

-Espoir-

Will allows himself to relax in the seat of Hannibal’s fancy car. He doesn’t want it to be over. He wants to spend more time with Hannibal. He never would’ve thought that he’d ever want something like this. To desire to spend more time with a friend, really, is something a younger Will Graham would’ve never thought about.

“Just thought I’d mention now, I have a shift tonight at eleven.”

He watches Hannibal’s face, waiting for an answer.

“Well, I’ll be sure to keep that in mind.”

Hannibal's face doesn't change. His concentrated eyes still focused on the road ahead. So Will looks back out his window.

"I just thought, after you know, just thought you'd like some coffee?"

For some reason, he feels disappointed with Hannibal's answer. Something inside him wanted the older man to be somewhat enthusiastic.

"Of course. I hope to be there and I hope to see you there."

Will looks over as Hannibal speaks, seeing him smile - eyes still trained on the road.

"Although.."

Will is prepared for the worst. Hannibal will now tell him how awful today was and how he hopes they won't ever have to do something like this again. But he'll say it in that perfectly polite tone - so obviously fake it nearly sounds real.

He looks down to his hands, rubbing the fabric on his knees with his thumbs as Hannibal continues.

"I must ask why you work so late. Surely it gets in the way of being a student?"

Will is surprised with the question. Good surprised.

"It was the only place around that would hire me."

Hannibal tilts his head, nodding slightly as an answer.

Will continues.

"And- and most of my lectures are later into the day. But some of them are at, like, midday. So hours are tricky. Either way, I still needed a job so the coffee place was the best bet."

"Is it far from where you live? I can't imagine many buses are around at the time you finish."

"Well, it's the *closest* place that would hire me. I didn't feel like taking a two hour train journey at four in the morning every day as you can imagine."

Hannibal laughs at the thought. He feels bad enough that Will probably has to walk a fairly long way to get home every night. Though, he also feels that offering a lift may seem a tad excessive - and he doesn't want to scare off Will so soon.

Hannibal is about to speak when Will beats him to it.

"You know-, I did have a different job at one point. Sometimes I consider going back to it, especially when it starts getting light outside while I'm still working a shift."

"Oh?" Hannibal implies for Will to keep talking.

“Yeah. It was a modelling gig. Good pay, but that’s it really. The hours weren’t bad like my current job, just unpredictable. Had to leave a few lectures last year because my agency called me in for a shoot.”

“Did you ever consider just doing it full-time instead?”

“A few times actually. But I kept reminding myself that things tend to not work in my favour a lot of the time. I’d prefer to have an average-paying stable job.”

“I suppose so. I’ve never seen inside the modelling industry, although I can see how it’d be unstable.”

“Mm. They’d love you.”

“Really?” Hannibal was curious about what Will meant.

“Yeah, you know, you check all the boxes they tend to look for. Tall, foreign guy, strong face, you know - that sorta thing.” Will mentioned all these points so casually.

“Hm, I’d never given it much thought.”

Hannibal knew he wasn’t a bad looking guy. He’d been showered with compliments ever since he was young. But it was different.

Compliments felt different falling from Will’s lips.

Hannibal always knew he was different, but he always managed to fit it. Will was just like him, but in the sense he never learnt to fit in. When Hannibal was around Will there was no need to fit in. Nobody he had to perform for. If this is what being different was truly like, Hannibal loved it.

To both the men’s dismay, the car eventually has to come to a stop. Hannibal parks on the side of the road, outside Will’s campus.

Just as Will is about to reach for the door, he stops himself.

He turns to Hannibal as if to say something. To this, Hannibal waits patiently.

Will looks at Hannibal’s expectant eyes and thanks him.

“I enjoyed today. Really, thanks for everything - you really didn’t need to do all of- ” Will motions around the car and to his coat. “ -this. But I really appreciate it either way. And I hope you did too.”

Will has never said something like that. He realises it probably sounds like something you’d say after a date. He cringes at himself, cursing his actions as he waits for Hannibal’s reply.

Hannibal smiles at Will. Will stares back at those beautifully coloured eyes, watching Hannibal’s face transform into that rare smile.

“I admit, I had a great time today. I’ll be glad to repeat it whenever possible - as soon as possible. So watch out for the bird scratching at your window, he’ll be the one to deliver the dinner reservations.”

They both laugh at the ongoing joke of pigeon mail. But again, something deep inside tells Will it isn’t entirely a joke. He’s still keeping his window locked though.

“See you tonight then, Doctor.” Will says with a smile as he begins to get out of the car.

“You too Mr Graham.” The car door shuts, cutting off the sound of the most perfect laugh.

Hannibal watches Will’s figure walk off in the back mirror reflection. His small frame disappeared into the distance.

When Will is completely no longer visible, perhaps already inside the building, Hannibal starts the car back up and heads into town.

The only thing turning through his mind was the modelling career Will had mentioned so casually. He felt like a starved predator, seeing red as their only objective was to hunt for food. Hannibal’s only objective was to find these pictures. The pictures being his source of food. Somewhere, out there in the world, were professionally taken pictures of a dolled up Will Graham. Sure, Hannibal knew that searching for pictures of a man you’d only met a day ago did seem slightly on the stalker side, but Will didn’t need to know. So what’s the problem?

Hannibal knew it was going to be like trying to find a needle in a haystack, but he had to start somewhere. He’ll start at newsagents, searching all the available magazines from the past two years. Then he’ll move onto the library - he’d look through every book on the shelf. Then if all else fails, he’ll see if the library computers are any help.

Hannibal doesn’t quite understand where the obsession with this man from the coffee shop had formed from - or how it’d grown so quickly. He was happy to feed it. Water it everyday to see what it’d become. He’d say this obsession was one of his much healthier ones. It didn’t hurt anybody - which was a change for sure - and it made Hannibal happier than he’d ever dream was possible.

Driving through the highstreet, he parks his car outside a newsagents, runs inside and makes a B-line to the magazine section. He skims through all the fashion magazines, praying to see just a glimpse of that god-like face for a moment.

No luck.

Hannibal isn’t defeated, of course, he knew this wouldn’t be easy and was prepared for disappointment. But even so, he couldn’t help feeling a little dissatisfied.

He repeats this process until he’s pretty sure he’s hit up every newsagent in the area. Hannibal predicted this part would be the least successful of his process. The small shops only tended to supply the most recent copies and Will had mentioned his career seemed to take place somewhere around last year.

Now, moving onto the libraries.

Hannibal parks his car just outside the library, hoping his luck with parking will reflect onto his findings inside.

Walking up the stone stairs, pushing open the heavy wooden door, then strolling into the quiet library.

This time, he had more options of where to look, so he decided to start with fashion.

Hannibal didn't have much knowledge of what was 'wanted' in the modelling world, however from what Will described - 'a strong face' - he assumed Will was most people's preference in the industry.

He'd been looking through copies and copies of art books made by designers for about twenty minutes now. He had all the time in the world. Well, he had until Will's shift tonight. But that wasn't for quite a while.

Hannibal opened up a black and blue hardcover book. He skimmed the pages like he had done with every other book on the shelf, however with this one, he stopped halfway through.

The book was Burberry, showing various designs from London collections over the years, and staring right back at Hannibal were those magnificent eyes.

Will's hair was shorter than its current length. Hannibal assumed it probably hadn't been cut since the photoshoot. It just about covered the nape of his neck, it was styled to show off Will's slightly curly hair, undamaged and free of split ends.

One specific picture really caught Hannibal's eye. It was one where Will was wearing a pair of glasses, alongside a woman. The two were posed together, faces practically touching.

Hannibal wanted this woman dead.

Of course, he understood it wasn't all her fault. Though she could've easily refused to take the picture.

Hannibal flipped through the pages for a moment more, making sure he didn't miss any pictures. Making sure he'd saved each and every one to his mind. He didn't care for anything else in the book - still he bought it. Besides, the black and blue spine would compliment the walls of his bedroom.

Exceedingly happy with his findings, he left the library with his new owned item. Placing it carefully in the passenger seat of his car, just where the real, physical, Will had been seated just a moment ago.

The radio is still playing, Hannibal hadn't bothered to turn it off after Will got in. He'd hoped that turning it on before Will got in would ease the awkwardness somehow. Music does of course calm the soul after all.

The song currently playing is the same one that he had spoken about with Will in the kitchen. Killer Queen. Hannibal thought this was odd, perhaps just a strange coincidence - but that's when he recalled reading the news just a few days prior. The lead singer of Queen, Freddie Mercury had recently passed. Hannibal had respected the man and enjoyed the sound of his unique voice. The thought of his passing did upset Hannibal slightly. He'd always enjoyed Queen's music as a teenager.

Hannibal drove home, enjoying the tribute to the late singer. Remembering the way Will hummed softly over the guitar riffs and tapped his fingers to the beat. He mirrored Will's actions, his index finger tapping along to the drums in the same way the younger man had on his kitchen counter.

-Espoir-

Hannibal stares absently at the new addition to his shelf. Giving his eyes a rest from studying for just a moment. It wasn't that the given work was difficult, it just took a long time to complete. - Which Hannibal personally did not see the point in. If he knew the information, he knew the information. Why was it needed for him to complete pages and pages worth of essays, along with long, boring test sheets. Again, the questions weren't difficult - they were just filled with questions that never seemed to end.

Hannibal checks the time. 7PM.

He still has four full hours until Will's shift starts. And even then, showing up as soon as he starts really didn't seem like the smartest idea. Of course he wanted to show Will he cared about him and that he wanted to become closer. What he didn't want was for Will to get a restraining order against Hannibal for stalking.

Hannibal didn't want to scare poor Will off so quickly. He'd noticed Will's small reactions to Hannibal's subtle displays of affection and compliments, but even then, he'd like to make sure these reactions weren't just a result of years of neglect in those areas.

Hannibal got up, not bothering to put any of his books away, remembering the note Will gave him - wondering how he could easily forget such a thing.

He walks quickly through the winding hallways of the penthouse, finally reaching the front door.

Hannibal reaches up towards the coat rack, retrieving the coat he had a few hours prior. He gets the note out his coat pocket and studies it for a moment. He doesn't recognise the address, nor does anything give away whereabouts it may be. Hannibal plans to check tonight, after 11 when he knows Will isn't home - again so he doesn't frighten the smaller man off.

He’s sure showing up unexpectedly at Will's door in the middle of the night may cause some confusion. But then again - there's only one way to find out.

Hannibal wants to find something to do to pass the time. He doesn’t want to cook anything - knowing that he isn't cooking for Will anymore just won’t give him the same enjoyment it usually does. Instead, he walks into his study - going over to a different desk to the one he was previously using. Laying out his drawing supplies, sitting down and starting to sketch.

He tries his best to draw such a beautiful face from memory - though it proves to be more difficult than Hannibal would like, as he’d seen the face a lot less than he’d hoped to.

He sketches Will’s features, his model-like jawline, those eyes, those eyes that could stop Hannibal’s heart if they looked at him a certain way. The tired lines under those perfect eyes - Hannibal hopes that one day he could be the cause to make them vanish. He’d support Will as much as the younger man would let him. He’d work all day whilst Will slept, not needing to move a finger to do anything. In Hannibal’s mind palace, Will lay resting in the older man’s bed, occasionally being hand fed home-cooked meals by Hannibal’s fingers.

Hannibal let his hands run free with the drawing as he wandered through this palace, thoughts being taken over by his new muse.

He thinks about Will. He thinks about the elevator ride up earlier today with Will. He thinks about Will eating his food, unknowingly putting something that most people would find sickening. Not Will though. After hearing the comments his dear had made about killings. Calling them ‘art’. Something told Hannibal that Will would be more accepting of Hannibal’s bad habits than he once previously thought.

Hannibal imagined the scene, Will knowingly eating someone Hannibal had prepared specially for him. Preferably Will’s Father. But Hannibal knows he can’t be too greedy.

Although the thought is quite enticing. He imagines how it would happen. Of course everything would be up to Will. He’d let his dear do it with his own hands. Or perhaps Will would prefer his hands to stay clean. If that’s the case, Hannibal would happily do all his dirty work.

Once again, Hannibal finds himself being swept away and realises the time. 10:57.

Will’s shift would start in 3 minutes, which means he should probably head to the address now - then visit the man he’d been aching for after just 7 hours of separation.

He tidies up the desk he was previously studying on. Putting away everything but a notebook and a pen, which he takes with him as he walks through the winding hallways of his place.

Hannibal walks towards his door, pulling on his coat as he notices Will’s old one.

He remembers Will’s request for Hannibal to throw it away - so he goes to do so. The coat feels heavy as Hannibal picks it up, feeling something in the lining of the coat.

He digs around for a second to pull out a small, metal sculpture of a stag head. It's small enough for it to go unnoticed in the lining of Will's coat for god knows how long.

The sculpture is detailed quite beautifully. Tiny ridges carved into the stag's shiny antlers, unlike its deep set eyes. There was no reflection in those tiny windows to the soul, just black. It was quite fascinating really, Hannibal will have to ask Will where he purchased it this evening.

He decides he'll give it back to Will later tonight, picks up the practically destroyed coat and takes the elevator down.

He throws the coat in one of the industrial trash cans in the parking lot before entering his car. Slightly glad to be rid of the bad smelling piece of textile.

Hannibal walks over to the car, the lights flashing as he unlocks it. He places the notebook in the passenger seat of the car, placing the pen into his coat pocket, along with the note Will had left him. He recalls the comment he made when talking with the younger man. About how he needs his address to send letters by bird. Will gave the address, no questions asked so it'd be rude for Hannibal *not* to send a dove over with a wax sealed envelope. Right?

-Espior-

The well-dressed man arrives an hour later at the address. From first glance, Hannibal can see it's a run down looking block of flats. He gets out of his car, making sure he locks it as he heads inside.

Hannibal takes the note out of his pocket again. 'Second floor, door furthest from the stairs on the left, cracked lock.'

He inspects where Will lives. Unhappy at the boy's living conditions. Hannibal recalls his childhood, the time where food was near impossible to find, the only person he cared for or spoke to was his sister, when sleeping could never guarantee safety.

Hannibal would never wish that situation on anyone. Well, nobody that deserved it.

He couldn't stand to be in this building. The smashed window from the floor below, the ongoing breeze of freezing air that seemed to come from all the *closed* windows, the loud shouting from uncaring neighbours and of course, the general uncleanliness of the entire building. Perhaps Hannibal should offer his place for Will to stay, he had a few spare rooms so Will would have some choice for his own sleeping arrangements. Hannibal would revisit the idea later.

Hannibal hesitates as he stands in front of the door, wanting to knock. He knows Will isn't home, then he considers if Will has a roommate - the thought makes him uncomfortable.

On that note, Hannibal checks his wrist and looks at his watch. 12:09. He heads off back to his car.

The drive to Will's workplace is easy enough, Hannibal gets to a point where he starts recognising main roads after managing to get himself out of the small winding ones.

It's a short drive, just 10 minutes. Hannibal wonders if Will walks to his workplace, judging from the lack of bus and train stations going that way, the answer is yes.

He parks just outside the shop, there seem to be little spaces filled with the lack of residence near and the time of night.

Hannibal collects the book from the passenger seat next to him and leaves the car, locking it as he walks to the glass door. He looks into the small shop, holding back himself from waltzing straight in so eagerly.

He straightens his clothing down, running his hand backwards through his hair to make sure everything is perfect. Then he walks in.

The sound of the door hitting the bell wakes Will from whatever dream he was stuck in. The blank expression on his face is replaced with a breathtaking smile. Hannibal returns the expression as he walks closer to the register.

Hannibal doesn't look around for the menu before ordering, he doesn't need to waste any of this much awaited time.

"Just the usual, thanks Detective."

Thankfully, it's only Will working. So the room is empty.

"Oh we're still doing this?" Will says quietly as he laughs. "Coming right up, Doctor."

Hannibal smiles in amusement as Will plays along. Watching as the scruffy man instantly starts to make a drink, that of which Hannibal knows will not disappoint.

He looks over to the tip jar, empty, just like last night.

Hannibal understands Will probably isn't the *best* person for working in customer service, but still, it is quite rude to not tip someone when they serve you such delicious coffee.

Hannibal places a £10 note into the jar, quietly of course, so Will doesn't notice.

"Busy today, Detective?"

Hannibal watches as Will looks down, subconsciously hiding his smile.

"Like always, you're the only face I've seen other than the occasional serial killer." Will places a metal beaker down by a machine, waiting for it to fill up. "You sure you're not one of them as well Doctor?"

Hannibal's face changes to a more serious look as their eyes connect. He tilts his head slightly as he speaks.

"Well, you got me there, detective. Those are some skills you have there."

"So I've been told."

They laugh together as Will places a hot paper cup on the counter by Hannibal.

Will punches some buttons on the cash register, his face concentrated as he attempts to get the old machine to actually do its job.

"Same as always Doc. Two-twenty-five." Will scratches the back of his head slightly as he reads the numbers out.

Hannibal passes Will a five-pound note.

"Keep the change of course."

"Generous." Will replies with a smile, placing the note into the cash register.

Hannibal sets his notebook out on a table closest to the counter, opposite the register.

Will isn't sure if he should keep silent, not wanting to disturb Hannibal. But also wanting to make conversation.

Hannibal is amused by Will's obvious nervousness, deciding to wait a moment just to see what Will decides to do.

He watches out of the corner of his eye as Will settles on making himself a drink.

Hannibal watches the shorter man make it, observing the way his calloused fingers perform such a simple task such as pouring milk - elevating it to art.

Hannibal watches him subtly for a minute, pen still in hand, head slightly turned up at Will.

The staring goes unnoticed by Will as his focus completely shifts away from the older man and to making his coffee.

Hannibal watches how he makes it - perhaps to bookmark the notion from future references. - Hannibal imagines the taste is unbearably sweet with the amount of sugar added. Hannibal wonders if this is a sign of Will having a sweet tooth - again bookmarking the theory for future references under the 'Will' section.

As Will finishes his task, wiping whatever liquid spilt on his hands on the apron, Hannibal, places his pen down to the middle of his page.

"You're right, you know." Hannibal mentions as he looks around the room.

"Hm?" Will hums as a reply, halfway through a sip of coffee.

“I remember you saying something about how the music can quickly become unbearable. I understand what you meant by that now, Will.”

“Right! I’ve searched so many times for the source, but I’m honestly convinced it’s some frequency sending sound waves straight to my brain.” Will speaks enthusiastically with his hands as he explains his theory.

Hannibal laughs at this, smiling at Will’s dedication to the subject.

“No really! Wherever you go it just stays the same. Doesn’t get louder, doesn’t get quieter. It’s like magic or some shit I’m telling you.”

Hannibal doesn’t reply, instead he just stands up.

Will watches him with curiosity from behind the counter.

Hannibal looks up for a moment, his eyes searching for the source of the noise until he points to a shelf on a wall on the opposite side of the entrance.

“There. It’s slightly louder from that direction.”

Will’s expression doesn’t change. He still looks as confused as he did a few seconds prior.

“I’m pretty sure I checked there already, but I guess it can’t hurt to look again.”

He walks around the counter and over to the shelf Hannibal pointed at. The taller man followed.

The lowest shelf reached to about Will’s shoulder, the tallest one well out of both of the men’s reach.

They both begin checking the items for anything that may be the source of the dreadful music.

After some time of checking each shelf over and over again, each time from different angles, switching places a few times to see if the other had missed something. Will thinks it’s time they admit defeat.

They both look at the top shelf, defeated from the height of it, that is, until Hannibal hears the sound of something scraping against wooden flooring - something Hannibal is unfortunately quite familiar with.

Will is pulling a stool towards Hannibal, his face showing the determination of an overworked detective about to crack a cold case.

Hannibal watches in surprise as Will manages to stand on top of the stool, hefty boots not giving him much balance on such a small surface. The taller man subtly shifts over to the wooden stool, placing a hand by Will’s feet to stabilise it. He couldn’t have Will falling over now, although, if Hannibal were to be a prince charming and perhaps… Hannibal considers kicking the leg of the stool in. But he then considers the fact Will may fall in the opposite

direction, crack his skull open, bleed out on the way to the hospital and die before Hannibal ever gets the chance to spend his life with him. So really, the odds aren't always in Hannibal's favour.

Will yells in joy, wobbling the stool slightly, he stiffens as he looks down to see Hannibal's face staring back at him, steady hands on the base of the stool.

They stare in silence for a second, before Will smiles, which develops into laughter as he looks back up to the shelf. Hannibal's face was dangerously close to Will's…. Hips. Not that they were touching or anything - but now Will felt like he could sense the other man's presence.

Hannibal looks at Will's hands by the shelf. He pulls out a black radio from behind a stack of decorative books and a faux plant. It had cables that fed into the wall - probably connecting to speakers dotted around the room.

Will speaks as he skips through the stations, the awful pop music finally coming to an end.

"You want anything specific - or should I just mute it?"

"I think I'd listen to anything right now as long as it wasn't something by Madonna."

Will laughs at their shared frustration for the repetitive music.

Will switches the station to a random one. He recognises the song playing from his days in his hometown, a Mary McBride song, 'No One's Gonna Love You Like Me.' He fiddles around with the radio for a minute more, placing the books back in their original position.

As he's doing so, humming the tune of the song, the back door of the shop opens up and in walks the other employee. Will rarely sees the girl and thinks nothing of it, so he continues what he's doing.

Hannibal notices Will's calm reaction after acknowledging the girl and decides she's nothing to worry about. Without a doubt not the manager. Watching as she went over to the counter to pick up something from the bakery section, Hannibal could see she wasn't a customer either. She had slim headphones connecting to a walkman that hung around her waist.

As she walked back towards the exit, she finally spotted the two men.

Hannibal understood they were in a position others may consider 'strange'. A man in a full suit holding the base of a stool for the employee who stood on top of said stool.

Her and Hannibal made eye contact, so he smiled back.

She nodded at him, then walked back out as if she hadn't seen anything. It seemed Hannibal wasn't adding anyone to his menu tonight.

Will goes to step off the stool, bending his knees.

Hannibal turns back to him, quickly reaching out a hand, watching as Will takes it without thinking, gripping it as he gets off the stool. The action goes practically unnoticed by Will as he drags the stool back to its place, then grabs his coffee from the counter.

Will sits down, pulling out a chair by Hannibal's table - sighing tiredly as he sips his drink.

Hannibal takes his seat opposite Will, however does not pick up his pen.

They both sit for a moment, enjoying the interrupted silence of an enjoyable song. Hannibal places a hand in the pocket of his slacks and remembers the small stag ornament.

He takes the small piece of metal out his pocket, holding it in the middle of the table.

"I found this in your coat as I was leaving to throw it out, it's quite beautiful really. Where did you get it?"

Will reaches out and takes it from Hannibal's hands.

"Can't exactly remember. I feel like I just picked it up one day at school, probably been in that coat ever since." Will jokes, inspecting the stag.

He places it back in the middle of the table.

"I'll probably just lose it again. So if you want it, it's yours."

Hannibal nods, humming in agreement as he slips the small metal stag back into his pocket.

They converse as the night progresses, Hannibal listening to every word that comes out those bitten lips. He focuses on the small details of Will's face - mentally takes pictures for references for all his future drawings. He wants them all to be as accurate as possible of course.

Hannibal was happy. He felt as if he'd lost the only joy in his life after forcing himself to keep his art off display. Too risky to show off his kills after being so close to being caught in Florence by the FBI.

However, he felt an indescribable dose of joy. One he hadn't felt in 20 years. One he hadn't felt since being around someone he loved so dearly.

Hannibal understood how his feelings for Will were developing - and he wasn't displeased. He also understood that these feelings could possibly never be requited, and again, it didn't bother him much. All he needed was to feel. Being in Will's presence brought him a warmth he hadn't felt in so long - a warmth he thought would never return again.

Chapter End Notes

If you don't understand what pictures are being mentioned in this - just search 'Hugh Dancy Burberry'. Trust me you won't be disappointed

I promise they'll start interacting more as this progresses. Just give it some time. ALSO IT'S DECEMBER?????

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> Just a tad bit shorter than the two previous chapters because I'm tired right now and just want to post this.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal felt the weight of the stag ornament in his trouser pocket. It was a comforting notion to know it was there. A small reminder of the indirect gift Will had given him.

“The girl that came in earlier, does she also work here?”

“Oh her? Yeah I'm pretty sure so.” Will stood up nonchalantly as he replied.

“But she doesn't help out?” Hannibal followed Will with his eyes. He watched as the man traced his hands over the counters whilst pacing the room.

“Well no, not really,” Will shrugged. “not that I mind though, prefer to be alone here anyway.”

He suddenly seemed to clock what he just said and suddenly added,
“Well I *did* prefer to be alone. I don't mind you being here - just that - you know, you wouldn't want someone watching you like a hawk as you space out.”

Hannibal smiled at Will’s smooth save. He found it quite sweet how Will didn't want to offend him in any way. Charming really.

“Understandable of course.” Hannibal said slyly. Will didn't know that watching him space out was exactly what Hannibal had been doing just before stepping in the building, then again, Hannibal had simply been admiring the local art. So who was he to blame?

Will continued to speak as he paced mindlessly around the room, running his finger tips over the polished surface of wooden tables.

“She's nice enough. Well. I haven't ever spoken to her, but she doesn't bother me - or try to speak to me. So in my books that means someone's nice enough.”

“Oh? Well if it's that easy to get into your good books where would you place me?” The older man smirked behind Will’s back. He decided to see how he'd react to teasing.

Will faced away from Hannibal, hiding his reddening face. The comment sounded like some sort of innuendo in Will's mind. But he convinced himself it was just because English wasn't Hannibal’s first language. Or course he'd word sentences differently.

“In my books?” Will smiled slightly, placing his hands on his jeans pockets as he Turned slowly on his heel towards Hannibal.

“Mm.” Hannibal replied. A cat-like smirk plastering his smug face.

“Well we haven't known each other for long. Have you considered that I haven't had a chance to place you anywhere yet?”

After seeing Hannibal’s expression, Will had gathered that he may be teasing him. So what else could he do but play along?

Hannibal tilted his head slightly, a flash of surprise interrupting his smugness for a second.

“I think you somehow already have a decent amount of knowledge about me, am I wrong?”

“Well, there's always more to learn about everyone. You can never judge somebody after just a few meetings, right Hannibal?”

Their eyes locked. Hannibal’s heart felt like it had gone into a painless cardiac arrest. Was Will *flirting* with him?

Hannibal had to remind himself that Will hadn't had much social interaction in recent years and possibly didn't know how to hold a conversation. The easiest thing to do when you're not sure on how to do something is, of course, to copy somebody else. And that's probably what Will was doing. Simply mirroring Hannibal’s actions. That’s all.

“You’re quite right I suppose, although knowing nothing about another person can sometimes add to the fun.”

“Oh?”

“You tell me where I currently stand in your mind. Then, in say, twenty years time - you can compare your feelings.”

Will tapped his bitten down fingernails to the beat of the current song playing, he’d reverted back to looking at the floor rather than Hannibal’s eyes. Still, he was smiling.

“Really think we’ll know each other in twenty years?” Will cocked his head to the side, for some reason unable to stop words from leaving his mouth. “So you’re saying I’m not just a fling, Doctor?”

Hannibal’s heart practically stopped. His breath was caught in his throat as he listened to the words coming from Will’s mouth. Of course the man was joking, but if this is how Will tells jokes - Hannibal would watch him do stand-up every night.

Hannibal watched Will’s face, his eyes nearly covered by brown locks of hair from his head being ever so slightly tilted towards the ground.

“Of course you aren’t my dear, whatever made you think that?”

Now it was Will's turn to go into cardiac arrest. Even though he was the one who initiated this type of conversation, he couldn't help but feel surprised when Hannibal went along with him, recuperating the act.

He allowed himself another glance at Hannibal. However, when he met those beautiful dark crimson eyes, he wasn't sure he was able to say goodbye so quickly.

It felt comfortable to keep eye contact with the handsome man. Like an action his body was already familiar with. Like something he'd been practising for years.

Hannibal was leaning his head on one of his hands, his jaw resting on a curled up fist. Will thought the action reduced the once intimidating looking man to quite a friendly face. It wasn't a bad look, he looked like the sort of guy from a movie that Will would have a crush on during his teenage years. Telling his Dad that he watched Aliens over and over again because of Ripley - the attractive female lead who's constantly in her underwear of course. *Totally not because of the beauty of a man that was Corporal Hicks.*

"Well I must say, Doctor-"

Will was halfway through his reply when the ding of a bell caused both men to whip their heads to look at the door.

Hannibal is understanding as Will instantly runs behind the counter. The man wasn't interrupting their conversation, he's merely coming in for a taste of the best-made coffee in London. Although Hannibal would've preferred a completely quiet night with his dear Will - but of course, absolutely zero interruptions is difficult in a public space. Still, Hannibal had decided to label the man as 'rude'.

The rude man was dressed in a suit. It wasn't designer - Hannibal would have recognised it of course. It looked expensive, but not luxury. He wore a deep blue suit with a red tie, quite a common choice for businessmen in London. He paired this outfit choice with unbranded sunglasses, along with small headphones over his ears. In Hannibal's personal and very humble opinion, he looked like a pretentious bastard trying to look as if his salary was much higher than it actually was.

He was short and quite stubby. The form fitting suit clearly had been a bad idea. Hannibal knew that people didn't need proper fashion sense to understand that much. The man's hair was greasy and slicked back, too much gel giving the look of 'I haven't seen a shower in months'.

The man tapped his foot impatiently, rolling his eyes as he watched Will hurriedly run to the cash register. As if Will was supposed to just teleport behind the counter.

Hannibal knew his quick assumption to mark the man as 'rude' had been the right choice. He kept his eyes trained on his William and this impertinent man.

Hannibal watched as Will took a deep breath, attempting to calm himself as he spoke.

"So sorry about that, it rare the we get customers at this ti-"

“I’ll take something with a good dose of caffeine in it. Get me something that’ll keep me awake. None of that *decaf* bullshit.”

Will looked stunned, and Hannibal understood why.

Someone had unexpectedly walked in, he had given Will the most vague order he’d ever heard, then sworn at him. All in the most angry, yet so monotone, posh accent. Will was left speechless for a moment as his brain processed the situation.

The man in the ill-fitting suit rolled his eyes and sighed during that small second of Will’s hesitation.

“So? Ring me up so you can hurry up and get making my coffee. How much is it?”

Will panicked as he punched a few numbers into the cash register, praying that the man would get too annoyed at how long he was taking and just walk out already. Things had already gone too well today, Will’s luck had clearly run out.

“Yeah- yeah, sorry. It’s three pounds.”

“For what?”

Will glanced over the man’s shoulder to meet Hannibal’s eyes. They both looked as confused as each other.

“The.. coffee?” Will wasn’t sure if he was being used in some sort of social experiment at this point.

“Well why didn’t you just say that.” The man muttered to himself as he reached into his pocket.

Will sort of hoped he would pull out a gun and just shoot him. But of course, his luck was still at zero.

Hannibal watched the man from behind, he stuck his small hand into the pocket of his slacks, struggling as he pulled out a slim looking wallet. The man was clearly having some difficulty pulling out some money with just one hand.

His other hand was occupied. Holding a book, surprisingly. The man was holding a copy of that newly released book - American psycho. Judging from where the small piece of paper was sticking out the top of the pages, he’d nearly finished it, though had clearly missed the real point of the novel, because he was acting just like the protagonist - Patrick Bateman. But from the looks of things, the man was instead looking like Patrick ate-a-man. But of course, that was all just Hannibal’s humble opinion. He smiled to himself at the thought.

Will’s insults were a little less creative, all his mind could come up as the greasy hand slapped some coins onto the counter was ‘dick’. Which still described him quite perfectly.

The man went back to sighing occasionally as he tapped his foot, once again acting as if Will had some sort of inhuman superpower to complete tasks as soon as you start them.

If it wasn't for the personal ban Hannibal had given himself on displaying his 'art', he'd string the insolent pig up as a love letter for Will, taking pleasure as he dragged his scalpel through that tough skin, shaping something so ugly into something beautiful for his dear.

Perhaps he'd gouge out his eyes. Hannibal could see how the pig watched Will, as if he was some low life creature he was thinking of stepping on. Besides, leaving behind an empty socket would possibly be an improvement. Hannibal would keep it on the low, nobody would recognise the kill as ill mostro's. It'd only be something to feed Hannibal's ongoing hunger.

Hannibal's thoughts were soon interrupted by an irritating sound.

"Look kid. I don't have all day. Stop being so difficult and hurry it up."

Will didn't reply as he awkwardly stood by a machine. He couldn't make it speed up in any way and was just silently praying that time would move a little faster.

Did it usually take this long to work? Will thought as he jammed the paper cup under the spout. He wasn't going to attempt anything fancy, like making sure it was poured a certain way - making the coffee smoother and more enjoyable like he did with Hannibal's.

Will hurriedly placed a lid onto the paper cup, bringing it back over to the counter. Clearly the rude man wasn't smart enough to wait just a few steps over. By the sign that quite clearly read: 'Collect Here!'

Will smiled insincerely, staring right into the man's brown eyes as he handed him the hot paper cup.

"Enjoy." Will's tone lacked any of the politeness it had a few minutes ago.

He didn't bother to give the normal 'Careful it may be hot'. That was common sense of course - but then again, Will had gathered that this impotent man was quite lacking in that department.

"Finally." The man replied as he turned away on his heel. Stepping towards the door.

Will let out of a sigh of relief, watching the man from the back.

Although, that feeling may have been premature as Will watched Hannibal stand up and walk over to the man.

"I'm so sorry to bother you, especially as you seem so busy." Hannibal was now the one with the fake smile. "I just couldn't help but notice your ID badge."

He nodded towards the ID badge clipped onto the man's front pocket.

The stubby man wasn't sure what to make of the situation. He noted Hannibal's expensive looking suit and decided he'd stop for the conversation.

"Yes?"

“Well I’ve been looking for someone -” Hannibal subtly glanced back down at the badge. “- working in glass manufacturing. Isn’t it lucky I’ve run into someone like you.”

The once annoyed look on the customer’s face was replaced with a pride-filled, smug expression.

“Sure is. What could I do for you, Mister..”

“Fell. Doctor Fell.”

“A doctor eh? Now I must know what I could be in service for.” He looked so proud of himself. As if he was the one who had just announced he was a Doctor.

“I recently moved into London, and would like a few pieces made. I thought that glass ornaments would really look beautiful in the penthouse.”

“Well, Doctor. You’ve certainly met the right person.”

“Perfect then. Could I just get your business card?”

Will notice the sly grin and Hannibal’s face shatter slightly. His expression was so different, but only for a second.

“Why of course. Let me just -” The man reached into the pockets of his blazer, eventually pulling out a small piece of card.

He handed it over to Hannibal. Having to look up quite a bit to make eye contact.

Hannibal made sure to carefully take the card, not wanting to make physical contact with their fingers.

The card was a slight off-white, paired with a maroon coloured text, along with a font where all letters were capitalised. How original.

The irritating noise once again interrupted Hannibal’s thoughts, though this time it whispered.

“Now I have to ask, Doctor, what’s a guy like you doing stuck here? This hole in the wall some great find or something?”

Once again the man’s rudeness was undeterred.

“No. You see -” Hannibal turned his body to face Will. “- I own this establishment with my husband.”

Hannibal kept his eyes on the man’s face. Watching in delight as his head looked back from the two men.

“You-, you do?”

“Mm.” Hannibal’s smile was real this time as he tucked the business card safely away in a pocket inside his blazer.

Will quickly caught on with Hannibal’s little act. He smiled as the shocked man looked him up and down, then looked at the coffee in his hands as he started to speak again.

“To each man himself I guess.”

That was the breaking point.

Hannibal couldn’t stand and watch someone plainly insult Will. Especially in front of the man presumed to be his husband. Really, it was quite rude.

“Didn’t you have somewhere to be? I assumed you were in a rush.”

The man looked back to Hannibal. Realising he had just insulted a guy who was definitely a foot taller than him’s husband. The doctor was no longer smiling at him, just a cold, empty expression looking down on him.

“Oh yes, you’re-, you’re quite right.”

Hannibal and Will both watched in amusement as the insolent man scurried out of the door. Pushing it at first in a panic. Then realising it was in fact a pull door.

Hannibal was still watching the man hurrying across the pavement as he heard Will’s voice.

“Well he was lovely wasn’t he?”

Will recalled the conversation Hannibal had struck up. He held back a grimace as he remembered the greasy man calling Hannibal ‘doctor’. For some odd reason, hearing it from someone else’s mouth gave him an unpleasant feeling.

Hannibal turned his head to face Will. Taking in the slight grimace on his face.

“Quite so.”

Will began to walk back around the counter as he spoke.
“Now I have to ask - what was with that last thing?”

Hannibal stayed put, not daring to move. His body faced the counter still, only tilting his head to watch Will. He felt afraid, and had forgotten to even attempt to mask it. Will was uncomfortable with Hannibal being his ‘fake husband’, even for just a few seconds. Had he read their previous conversation in the wrong way. Will *had* been flirting with him just a few minutes ago. Hannibal was so sure of himself he’d forgotten to even think about the small details. Will may not even be romantically interested in men, let alone Hannibal.

The older man was about to put together an explanation when Will spoke.

“Not that I’m against it, of course just wanted to know why-” Will suddenly displayed an expression of worry, as if he’d just remembered something he really shouldn't have forgotten.

“- I mean, against- you know, two- two guys. I’m not- well *I am*, I mean I’m not against the gays -”

Hannibal’s face of panic didn’t change, he didn’t have time as he watched the stuttering man. He was frozen, unable to move as he tried to say something to Will’s fit of distress.

“- like really, *really*, don’t- don’t have anything against them.”

Will’s eyes were darting all over the room, trying desperately to find something to focus on. His hands flailed about as he tried to explain himself.

The room was filled with the quiet hum of country music and Will’s shaky breathing.

Will desperately just wanted Hannibal to just say something. The air was awkward and felt uncomfortable to breathe in. But still, Hannibal was frozen, wide eyes fixed on Will’s smaller frame, body still facing the counter.

Eventually the air started to clear, replacing the sour feeling with a slightly less uncomfortable one. Hannibal’s eyes softened and he felt his body turning to match where his eyes were looking.

He sighed before speaking, placing his hands into his slacks, running his fingertips over the stag ornament.

“My apologies Will, I didn’t intend to make you uncomfortable at all. I simply felt that perhaps someone so rude needed to be humbled. Again, I am sorry.”

“No- Hannibal, it’s- look it’s fine. You didn’t make me uncomfortable. Infact, I thought it was pretty funny.”

Will allowed himself to shift into a small smile, recalling the recent event.

Hannibal watched Will’s amused expression. The way his eyebrows raised, his lips curving upwards and his nostrils flaring slightly.

“Well. I’m glad you weren’t against it.”

Will instantly felt himself flush red at the words. Of course Hannibal had caught onto his bad wording and used it to flirt with him. He didn’t blame Hannibal. Of course, Will had been the one teasing him before they were interrupted.

Their eyes met. The warm feeling Will had previously felt rushed back to him - like an addict clasping a needle and a belt after weeks of nothing. It felt good. It gave Will such pleasure to do something as miniscule as making eye contact. Yet for some reason, the small action felt so intimate.

Hannibal didn’t mind Will’s silence to his comment. He wouldn’t mind anything if it meant he’d see that beautiful expression again and again.

He moved back to his seat, his pen still sitting idly in the middle of the notebook.

Will followed, pulling out the opposite chair and lowering himself onto it.

Hannibal interlocked his fingers and leaned his elbows on the surface of the table. “Where were we before being so rudely interrupted..”

He smiled proudly at the sound of a small chuckle.

Will jerked his head up, staring at the ceiling. His legs were spread widely in the seat. Arms crossed and body slouched lazily.

“You tell me, Doctor.”

Hannibal watched Will’s adam's apple throb slightly as he spoke. His throat displayed so openly, like prey trapping a predator so cleverly.

“I do believe I was convincing you that you weren’t just a fling.”

Will slowly let his head back down, eyes level with Hannibal’s broad chest.

He smiled and raised his eyebrows for a moment.

“As wonderful as that conversation sounds, I do have something I’ve been wanting to ask you since you walked in.”

Hannibal was surprised Will had shut down their previous conversation, especially after Hannibal was so sure it was Will who had first initiated the flirting. But still, he was curious and always open to the younger man’s questions.

He noticed Will’s eyes, fixed on his front pocket. Perhaps Will found staring at his chest a more comfortable alternative to eye contact. Hannibal wasn’t one to complain.

The older man strategically fixed his tie, pulling on the front of his shirt collar inconspicuously, knowing the action would draw Will’s attention to the centre of his chest. A place Hannibal was sure the brunette would find *even more* comfortable.

And it worked. Oh it *worked.*

Hannibal watched in pleasure, the cat-like smile returning once again, as Will shifted in his seat. His back straightened as his legs partially closed.

“Ask away.” Hannibal said too casually.

Will quickly collected himself, trying to act as if he wasn’t fighting the urge to fuck a guy he’d known for barely two days in the middle of his workplace.

“Why are you here?”

Hannibal’s curiosity grew.

“Whatever do you mean?”

Will sighed to himself, struggling to explain thoughts in words. Hannibal imagined getting lost in that cluttered mind palace. He wouldn't mind getting lost there for a few hours.

"Well you're clearly set for life - money, med school and an insanely nice place to live."

Hannibal sat patiently, crossing his legs under the table and leaning back in his chair. Eyes still locked on Will of course.

Will spoke in large gestures with his hands. He was a stuttering mess trying to put his disorderly thoughts into words that someone would understand. There were so many unnecessary rules to follow when trying to speak to another person. Will couldn't just say what he really wanted to because that'd be 'rude'. So instead he has to figure out some other fancy way of wording it. Both words always have the exact same meaning, just one wording is considered 'more polite'.

Although, Will remembered who it was he was speaking to. A small voice told him these rules didn't apply with Hannibal. In their language, there was no right or wrong way to word something.

"Are you hanging out with me because of pity or something?"

Hannibal wasn't too shocked by the question, still surprised though.

He understood Will possibly had a low self esteem - of course Hannibal would be delighted to convince him otherwise one day. He'd worship Will from the top of his long, tangled hair, to the soles of his worn out, steel capped boots. He'd sing praises for every inch of this man's body. Hannibal would take his time, working from Will's chapped lips until he reached his beautifully thin, long legs. Recalling how Will looked just a few minutes ago, legs sprawled out towards the side of the table - Hannibal asked himself why he was ever stunned at the mention of Will having a brief modelling career. It was obvious Will wasn't exactly tall, still, he really did have legs for days.

"Like I've told you before, Will. I enjoy your company. I like to be around you, dearest boy."

Hannibal knew calling Will such a name would definitely have some sort of effect. It'd get a reaction. That's why Hannibal did it.

And a reaction he got.

Will shifted once again on the cool wooden seat of the hard chair. This time hiding back into himself rather than spreading out. He crossed a leg to rest his right foot on his left knee. His calloused hand rested on his knee, an arm hiding his hips from Hannibal's view.

Hannibal watched intently in satisfaction as Will's pale cheeks flushed in a cherubic fashion. Will was no angel though.

Will was succubus sent to Hannibal. If it was punishment or reward, he was quite happy either way.

Will didn't give himself the honour of recovering from Hannibal's comment.

“But why? What is it that you enjoy? I don’t understand.”

Hannibal knew Will wasn't doing this to fish for compliments. He genuinely couldn’t understand what somebody could like about him so much that someone would like to spend time with him. Frankly, Hannibal didn’t know either. He couldn’t exactly answer with ’Because the moment I saw you spaced out behind that counter, I wanted to see you spaced out between my legs.’

He wanted Will to know that of course Hannibal thought he was the most beautiful creature to walk this earth, but that wasn’t all. Will’s mind was something that slot so perfectly into Hannibal’s. He wanted Will to realise this. They were made for each other. He wanted Will to realise that nobody other than Hannibal would do.

“You’re a cold breeze on a scorching day.”

Will was silent, eyes searching Hannibal’s for any signs of deceit. Any sign that he was about to burst out laughing, telling Will it was all just a big joke on him.

But Will found nothing.

Hannibal took Will’s silence as a chance to carry on.

“Others who tend to crowd me are quite different. They see me as merely a stepping stone. A ladder to something greater. They see my wealth, my family name and my education. All they see for my future is the salary I’ll earn one day.”

Hannibal was regrettably the one to break eye contact this time. His hands felt clammy in his silk lined pockets. He loathed this feeling.

He wasn’t sure what the cause of it was - couldn’t recall the last time the pathetic wave of nausea surfed through his veins, washing throughout his chest. Nonetheless, it was familiar.

“You like hanging out with me because I don’t want your money?” Will practically laughed.

“Unfortunately, that does seem to be my standard of a friend. Yet, that isn’t the only reason.”

Will paused for a moment before replying. He didn’t let words fall out his mouth like they usually did when speaking with Hannibal. He wanted his answer to be thought out and calculated. He wanted it to actually mean something.

The tension of the echoey room was heavy. It was thick. Even one of Hannibal’s well used culinary knives may have a tough time cutting through it.

Hannibal masked his shaky breaths. Focusing his energy on trying to not let Will know the thoughts spinning and bouncing off the walls of his palace. Even so, that voice that’d be so rudely butting in during the last two days told him something again. There was no point. There was no point trying to hide something from someone who sees it all. Will was an omniscient entity in Hannibal’s mind. All knowing, all seeing. There was nothing Hannibal could hide.

To Hannibal, Will was a God.

His God.

His newly found religion.

A deity worthy of Hannibal's sacrifice. Someone he would devote everything to.

And by God, was his deity beautiful.

"Will I like the other reason?"

The heavenly voice of a southern man interrupted Hannibal's prayers.

"I do not know."

Hannibal's answer was short and left little to go off of. Perhaps Will's previous tactic of just letting his mouth, not his mind, do the talking was the easiest bet.

Will took his chance to inspect Hannibal's face. It was the first time - apart from when Hannibal was driving - that Hannibal had chosen not to lock eyes.

Without the distraction, Will could properly see him.

Will could see Hannibal. He could read him.

All Will's life, his ability to so easily see the ins and outs of someone's mind had cost him the chance of friends. The chance of making real, human connections.

Instead, these connections were replaced with a growing disease. The cost of Will's loneliness. All his life, he believed he'd eventually die with this disease. He was born into the world with someone leaving him. He'd die in this world leaving no one. In a way, it was sort of peaceful. Will had nobody to disappoint. Nobody to try so hard for. Nobody to impress.

After all, Will had nobody.

Until Hannibal.

The man who'd artfully tripped into his world, yet already seemed to recognise all the roads.

It'd only ever been Will in this strange world, but here this stranger was. He knew where to go, where every road led. Hannibal knew the rough edges of every brick wall built up.

"I don't want to know. -" Will eventually decided.

Hannibal's eyes finally darted back to Will's. They had a tinge of fear, well hidden behind sheets of deep red.

"- Because I'm scared of my own reply."

“And could I be so rude and ask why you’re scared?”

“Because I know no matter what you say, I won’t understand your reasoning.”

“Perhaps one day you will.”

“Doubt it, Doctor.” Will smiled pitfully, mostly at himself.

Hannibal returned the gesture.

“Think about it. Detective.” Hannibal’s head tilted as his small smile shifted into a devilish grin.

Will let out a stifled laugh at the ironic comment. Being called a detective when he can’t even work out why someone finds him interesting. None of his previous friends had ever stuck around for more than an hour in school. Let alone an entire day. Will might’ve well married Hannibal and moved to Italy with him at the rate they were going. The record for a friendship with someone Will’s age was from the beginning of the school lunch break, to the end. So really, Hannibal was already like an old friend.

The comfortable quietness of the room is interrupted by a static noise from the speakers.

“That’s my sign then.”

“Sign for…?” Hannibal questioned, watching Will stand from his seat and stretch his arms over his head.

Will began to walk towards the counter, arms still above his head in a stretch.

Hannibal enjoyed the pleasant view from behind. The tie of Will’s company apron accentuating all the right places of Will’s stained tartan blue shirt. The man ran his hands along the apron covering his thighs, pressing his fingers to the sides of his hips to click them.

The sound echoed off the shelved walls, like bones cracking in a seemingly empty alleyway.

Will disappeared behind the counter, his bottom half now out of view.

“Sign for my shift to end - I mean, technically it ended about ten minutes ago. Guess I was just having too much fun.” Will focused his hands to the back of his apron, attempting to undo the back.

At the indication of Will’s departure, Hannibal concluded it was also his turn to do the same as he began to close his notebook and place the pen in his front pocket. The taller man swung his coat around his shoulders and onto his arms. He leans to pick up the book when his focus is shifted by a sound of annoyance.

“Shit, did I manage to tie this in a knot or something?”

Will was by the cash register, hands fiddling behind his back at the tassels of the black apron.

“Sorry - I don’t know how I’ve managed this, can you see if it’s possible to undo or if I’m going to need to cut myself out of an apron.”

Hannibal obeyed Will’s command like a well trained dog. His feet moved before he could even start to reply.

“Of course.”

Will felt the taller man’s presence behind him, he felt almost ridiculed. Asking Hannibal to stare at his ass momentarily.

What a charming guy he must think I am.

Hannibal, on the other hand, really didn’t mind.

“Don’t worry dear Will, you won’t have to chop yourself out of this one.”

Will could hear the smirk in Hannibal’s voice. He didn’t feel humiliated, just sort of sheepish?

Before Will could move his arms to untie the knot by himself the presence felt much heavier. Especially around his hips.

Hannibal skillfully unties the garment from behind Will. His fingertips ghosting the bones of Will’s back, dangerously close to Will’s lower back.

A side of Hannibal told him to go further. Will had already shown signs of affection, why not just speed the process up a little? Skip a few steps. Grab his God by the hips and fuck him gently against the cold countertop for everyone to see. Have everyone admire Hannibal’s devotion to his religion.

Hannibal rapidly cast the thoughts away, saving them for a more appropriate situation. Like when he's alone on his mattress in a few hours.

Instead of bending Will over a counter, Hannibal straightens up and takes a step back.

“And you’re free, mylimasis.”

Will turns around to face his body towards Hannibal, ducking his head down as he lifts the apron from his neck.

“Thanks.” His voice has traces of amusement and embarrassment. “Really thought I’d be stuck in there for a minute.”

Will hangs the black apron up on the wall next to a collection of others.

“Lucky I was here to save the day then.”

“Of course.” Will picks up his coat and slides his arms cautiously through the sleeves, treating the jacket like a priceless statue. To Will, it basically was.

He squints his eyes and massages the area around his ear with his middle finger.

"C'mon, let's get going. If anyone asks, the radio was working perfectly fine when we left."

Hannibal smiled at the crafty man. He'd never thought about experiencing small things in life. He, of course, had never planned to sneak out of a coffee shop with a man he'd met a day ago, pretending that they hadn't broken an entire sound system. But then again, Hannibal had never planned on meeting someone he'd sneak out of a coffee shop and break an entire sound system with. But here he is. Somehow.

The two men walk side by side to the door, Will digging his hands into the deep pockets of his new coat, preparing himself for a long walk in the cold - Hannibal picking up his notebook off the table as they walk past.

He glances quickly at the tap jar. Empty. Hannibal was thankful Will was actually taking the tips home. He wouldn't put it past the younger man to somehow get the money back to Hannibal.

Hannibal reaches to open the door, stepping aside so Will could walk ahead.

Will stopped abruptly in front of the open door.

He made a confused face. "Mylimasis?"

Hannibal had barely registered it himself when he had uttered the word earlier, he was surprised Will even remembered the pronunciation.

"It's Lithuanian, for someone who is clumsy." Hannibal disliked lying to Will, but it was worth it by not admitting he'd just called the younger man 'beloved out of instinct.

Will stepped through the door and out into the British, winter air Hannibal followed closely behind.

"I get trapped in an apron one time and all of a sudden I'm clumsy?" Will says teasingly.

"Well. Are you a clumsy person?"

"I wouldn't- no I wouldn't exactly say that I'm- well I'm not -"

"Would you like a ride, mylimasis?"

They had reached Hannibal's car, parked just a few strides from the entrance of the building.

The frosty air speared the back of Will's throat as he breathed in. A cloud of warm, white breath was visible as he breathed back out.

The streets were bitterly cold, dark and uninviting to say the least. Hannibal's car was heated and particularly inviting. Hannibal's car had Hannibal.

Will sighed, his warm breath once again contrasting against the icy air. He had already gotten so much from Hannibal today. Will was convinced that if Hannibal were to spend just a few more minutes with Will, he'd finally snap. He'd say a weirdly creative insult, tell Will to never come near him again and storm off. Will would be left alone on the frozen pavement, watching the shiny sedan speed off into the fog.

But maybe he wouldn't.

"Yeah, actually. If that wouldn't be too annoying."

Will pushed away his previous chain of thoughts. Starting a new slate, clean and ready to change.

Hannibal felt a sense of pride as he took a few steps towards the passenger's door. Every other action Hannibal had done where he'd offered something for Will, it'd taken a couple minutes of convincing. But just like Will's questions today, his answer was straight to the point. Clearly his beloved didn't enjoy beating around the bush, atleast, not in a metaphorical sense.

Hannibal opens the door of the car, once again standing to the side with a smile.

Will allowed himself to accept the gesture, their eyes meeting briskly as Will clambered into the leather seat. The smooth, comforting fabric felt familiar on his fingers.

Will dearly hoped this feeling would become a recurring theme. A privilege he'd get to frequent.

Chapter End Notes

I mean who wouldn't be thinking that when seeing the back of Will Graham next to a counter????

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Anything interesting you have planned for tomorrow?" Hannibal's eyes stared ahead at the barely lit road as leather clad hands clutched the steering wheel.

"If you count getting through a full day of classes on three hours of sleep as interesting, then yeah. My day is thrilling."

The two men were sitting in Hannibal's luxury car. The two windows of the backseat were foggy from their combined breath, in contrast to the numbing air outside.

The cold leather underneath Will had warmed quickly from Hannibal instantly blasting the heating as soon as they had sat down. Will once again ran his fingers over the plush material covering the seat. The motion was soothing, permitting Will to soon forget the unwanted stress of his general life. The comforting sensation caused him to subconsciously rub his palms back and forth on the fabric.

Hannibal could see the smaller man's hands shifting around from his peripheral vision. The thought of Will finding contemptment from Hannibal's belongings was a rewarding feeling.

There was no radio at this hour to distract from the small silences between sentences - *not that the signal would reach this strange, seemingly away from modern society, area of England.*

"No shift tomorrow?"

"Thankfully not." Will said with a sarcastic smile. "I've got classes nearly every hour from six 'till seven so there's no way I'd survive all of that *and* another few hours at work."

"Do you have a break at all?" Will didn't even have to look at Hannibal to know he had some sort of look of concern on his face. It was as if Will had just told him he'd be working down in the mines for the next four days.

"Well they give me about ten minutes in between classes, and at one-thirty I get an hour and a bit. Same thing at about five-ish as well." Will laughed softly at the older man's troubled reaction. "Don't worry. They don't have me working straight for thirteen hours."

Hannibal nodded his head slowly. Clearly not quite at ease from the thought of *his Will* being forced into such awful hours no matter where he goes. Chances are, he's smarter than the professor of his classes, let alone the other students attending. *Such imbeciles shouldn't have the licence to mould such a uniquely exceptional mind. Nobody should ever be granted such permission.*

"What about you?" Will turns his head to face Hannibal. "Your day as fun as mine?"

He watches Hannibal's lips part into a deep sigh, entranced by the slight stubble of facial hair around his mouth, the way his flawless, supermodel-worthy cheekbones stayed prominent as he partly opened his jaw. The glow of the flickering street lights highlighted these sublime features finely.

Will takes Hannibal's displeased sigh as a sign.

"Even *more* fun than my day?" Hannibal smiles at Will's enthusiastic sarcasm. "Wow. No you just *must* tell."

"My timetable for classes, similarly to you, is quite busy."

Will tilts his head back into the headrest. Sarcasm still present in his tone. "Glad we're in that together then."

"There's more." Hannibal matches Will's fake enthusiasm.

"More?" The enthusiasm is replaced by curiosity.

"I've been invited to a *friend's* formal engagement party. Something I admit I've been highly anticipating for a while now."

A laugh breaks through Will's not so well hidden grin.

"So you've been invited to someone's party and you barely know the guy? God, what even as a *'formal'* engagement party?" He makes quotation marks with his fingers.

Hannibal had noticed Will was exceptionally expressive with his hands whenever speaking. Just another one of the many charming qualities of Will Graham.

"Well. I wouldn't put it like that." Hannibal's head tilted to the side, his politeness towards others still present when they're not.

"*Well*," Will mocked Hannibal's tone. "You're too much of a gentleman to say something like that. But really, I think I know how you *actually* feel."

"Is that where you've decided to place me in your mind Will? In the 'easy to read' section." Hannibal referenced their interrupted conversation from earlier.

"Pretty sure you're the opposite. Everyone else is easy to read and you're the complicated one."

"So why is it that you were able to deduce me so quickly, Detective?" A sort of flirtatious tone was spun onto his question.

"I've always been shit at knowing what people are thinking, but, I don't know." Will was having difficulty putting his tangled thoughts into words again. Hannibal kept his patience like a true gentleman and allowed Will to map out his mind. "I just, I don't- I don't know. With you it felt easier?" Will instantly realised *after* he had spoken, just how intimate his

wording sounded. Then again, he wondered if there was any *less intimate* way he could've put it.

"It's not unlikely to realise you get along with a stranger better than family. Making true connections can be a rare delight."

Hannibal's two sentences were short and brief, yet carried the meaning of an entire essay dedicated to his subject. *Said subject being a tired, overworked barista from the South.*

Will nodded at Hannibal's reply, and decided one of his own wasn't needed.

"What about you?"

Hannibal was confused by Will's sudden question. "What about me?"

"How do you see me, what section am I under?" Will was referring to Hannibal's question just a few minutes prior.

Hannibal didn't hesitate, he answered as sudden as the question was spoken. "The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by."

Will laughed, the noise becoming music to Hannibal's ears.

"Are you calling me a mongoose?" Will jokingly said, a fake offended look expressed on his face.

This made Hannibal laugh, of course Will was going to take the comment literally, not understanding the metaphor behind it. "Not exactly, although I can promise you it's positive."

"Well that's all I need to know."

The two men smiled at the interaction, Will's amusement coming from picturing himself as a mongoose beating up a snake. Hannibal's amusement coming from Will's charming reply, Will's confusement over Hannibal referring to him as a small mouse-like, snake killer.

Silence stained the air for a moment. Until Will remembered the topic they were previously talking about, deciding he wanted to spend as much as the journey speaking to Hannibal.

"So, tell me about this *formal* engagement party."

"To explain it in the most blunt terms, it's really a party where a fairly affluent person invites other people to an expensive venue to boast about their oversized ring and talk about themself."

Will was nearly stunned by Hannibal's change in character. "You're starting to sound like me already."

Hannibal swept his gaze over Will, smirking at himself.

His sneer was swiftly replaced by a more serious expression. “Perhaps I’ll work on my accent in the mirror at home.”

Will stared at the older man’s face. If you told lonely old Will Graham from yesterday that he’d be sitting in a luxury car, making jokes with the handsome man with the black coffee - he would’ve probably flipped you off and given you a creatively made insult along with it.

But, here he was.

Sat in a luxury car.

Here he was, sat in a luxury car, making jokes with the handsome man with the black coffee.

Oh how Will wished he could stay trapped in the moment for a while longer.

“You should come.”

Will’s train of thought was broken by the sudden question.

They were outside Will’s apartment building. He decided he was too tired to question how Hannibal had ended up there with Will’s severe lack of directions toward the end. Right now, his brain had to focus and not subconsciously give his new friend a kiss on the cheek as a goodbye. - A much more difficult task than you’d think.

“To what?”

“The party, I think you should come with me.”

Without thinking, Will’s mouth moves faster than his mind and he chokes out a reply. “Oh- oh no, really. That’s really *not* my thing, at all.”

“My delightful friends are always complaining about me never bringing a plus-one to these events. I’m sure they’d be happy no matter who I’d bring.” Hannibal’s emphasis on ‘friends’ once again highlighting his true feelings.

“I mean- I don’t really think that I’m what they have in mind when they suggest a plus-one.” Will’s mind flickered to a vision of a woman, very much unlike Will. Clean, branded clothes, tall. Someone you’d expect to see a guy like Hannibal with. “Besides, I’ve never been to something like that - I wouldn’t have anything to wear - really, I’d be a bit of a letdown.”

“It’s always much more wise to try something before deciding your opinions.”

“Yeah well, that can go for everything, right? Just because I haven’t *murdered* someone doesn’t mean I’ll try it just to check if I get a kick out of it.”

Hannibal could now face Will in the parked car. He searched those glorious blue eyes for any deeper meaning to the comparison, however found no signs of anything but a mere

coincidence. Hannibal had thought about Will's potential. A small spark blinked from inside Will. A spark that could become very reactive when mixed with the right catalyst.

"Although perhaps they're on a similar spectrum, I wouldn't consider murdering someone and an engagement party on quite the same level."

"I would."

Hannibal surprised himself with the small, stifled laugh he let out. Where he would usually find rudeness in such a reply, he found *humour?*

"Anyway- look, I'll go, okay? Just, you don't don't have to buy me a suit or anything." Will spoke with a stern tone, like a parent laying down rules with a small child. "I can take care of that myself."

Hannibal was delighted with Will's answer. He was very much prepared to get down on his knees in the middle of the dark street and beg Will to go with him, and still expected Will to decline. So this was an extremely good outcome for Hannibal's part.

He could picture it now: *walking through a crowd of people he didn't know - but somehow they knew him - with Will on his side, Will would know nobody, only Hannibal. Will would be completely reliant on Hannibal to get him through the evening. If all went his way, Will wouldn't leave his side the entire time. Never out of arm's reach. Just how everything should always be. Never too far from God.* Really, it's beautiful.

"I must admit, that is good to hear. I have really been dreading this event. I'm sure you'll make it much more bearable." Hannibal looks in the direction of Will's eye level, in hopes that maybe he'd get to steal a glance of those blue orbs. A chance to lock to memory deep inside a chained up room in his mind palace, the only key in existence kept on Hannibal's person at all times.

Will shrugged. "It's probably the least I can do after everything today. If it's something I can do as a favour, I guess it couldn't hurt." His eyes still hadn't met Hannibal's.

"Once again, dear Will - I don't need payment for the simple enjoyment of your company. You wouldn't pay a friend to meet up, would you?"

Will met Hannibal's strong gaze for a small second. "I wouldn't know." He spoke quickly and subdued, as if he needed to get the words out but didn't want anyone to hear them. "So.. what is it that I'll have to do at this *party*?" Will sighed as he muttered the word 'party'. The word tasted sour and unfamiliar on his tongue.

"It starts at about eight. So if you like I could pick you up from your last class and we'll go to your apartment, giving you time to get ready."

The thought of Hannibal discovering how Will lived had him feeling uneasy. The poor man seemed concerned by lack of sleep, Will would hate to see his reaction to the apartment's empty fridge and bare cupboards. He'd just have to hope Hannibal wasn't expecting the favour of a home-cooked meal to be returned.

Although, it was either Hannibal coming over for a few minutes, or Will having to sit on a bus in a suit and tie for hours. So really, his options did seem exceptionally limited.

“Sounds good. I’ll go out on one of my breaks tomorrow and see if I can find anything to wear.”

“If you can’t find anything yourself, I wouldn’t mind arriving late if it meant trying on suits for an hour.”

Something inside Will wanted to hate that sentence. *’If you can’t find anything yourself’* as if Will was some sort of incapable child. Although, he couldn’t hate it. Admittedly, Will wanted to laugh. He wanted to laugh at Hannibal’s enthusiasm for suits and how such a polite man wouldn’t mind showing up to something late just to try on expensive clothes. To play dress up with Will for an hour. In Hannibal’s defence, the idea did seem more appealing with more thought.

“Don’t you worry, if there's anybody who can find a matching four-piece suit in three separate charity shops - it’d be me.”

“What a strange yet helpful talent to have.” Amusement tagged along in Hannibal’s tone.

Will’s subconscious decided now was a comfortable moment to hold eye contact. “I also make a *mean* coffee.”

“What else is there to look for in a man?” Hannibal replied in a faux-enthusiastic tone.

“Well that’s what I’ve been saying, but the ladies just won’t listen.”

Hannibal very nearly said something along the lines of ‘*I’ll listen*’ however, unfortunately - or maybe gladly - Will spoke again.

“So I’m right to guess this isn’t a get-black-out-drunk-and-pass-out-on-the-dance-floor kind of party.”

“Regretfully so, although I suppose there will be alcohol. I’m driving, so perhaps you’ll have to hold my share as well.”

Will smiled and replied in a monotonous voice. “Oh no, what a shame.”

“It will be a lot of talking, like I said, people showing off and trying to impress someone they’ll never meet again. If you allow me to get through all the conversations all your job will entail is standing and looking pretty.”

Will’s body had turnt in the car seat to face Hannibal over their time in the parked vehicle.

“Look pretty? God I better be getting paid for such a difficult career.”

“I fear it will come naturally.”

Will felt the redness creeping up on his cheeks as his eyes shot around to avoid Hannibal's somewhat seductive gaze. "We'll have to see."

The enclosed space was filled with an awkward silence for the first time. It was just as uncomfortable as both the men had imagined.

Hannibal slipped his hand from off the wheel and into his pocket, returning his fingertips to the smoothness of Will's stag ornament.

Will clicked his tongue and began to move. "I've just got to say now - this day has been the most fun I've had in years." He avoided eye contact, reverting back to his shell as he reached for the door.

Hannibal had thousands of words ready in a reply. Poems to recite in his head. Yet just a few seconds to say goodbye. He nodded his head slowly. How was he unable to give Will something as small as a goodbye?

Will opened the door, taking Hannibal's silence as his cue to get out the car, run up to his flat and scream into a pillow for a hot minute. His rubber sole of one foot hit the cracked pavement before the deep, accented voice behind him spoke.

"I hope tomorrow is just a fraction of how enjoyable today was."

Will turned his head to face Hannibal. He felt a smile insert itself onto his face.

"Me too."

Hannibal knew the two words meant so much more than anything spoken today.

"Goodnight, Will."

Their eyes were locked on eachother, still, the moment felt unfinished.

"Night, Hannibal." Will watched the older man's elegant features for a moment more, waiting for something he knew wasn't going to arrive.

Will slung his bag over his shoulder, closed the door and turned away, walking towards the shabby building. Eyes widening in delight as he spotted the semi-clean floor and boarded-up window. What kind soul had fixed the window whilst he was out?

Hannibal followed Will's form as his silhouette grew smaller and smaller.

He waited for a few more minutes until he saw a light turn on from what he knew was Will's apartment. He smiled at the thought of Will in a domestic situation. He'd always seemed so stressed. Either carrying around a textbook filled bag or wearing a company apron. The thought of the scruffy man in an oversized white shirt and red tartan pyjamas was a pleasant sight. Or perhaps Will slept in something else. Maybe just an old shirt and his underwear? Now that was a *pleasant* sight. Hannibal locked the image away in that secret room with the rest of his fantasies.

Hannibal finally took his eyes off the building that Will occupied. He took his hand out his pocket, his skin instantly missing the friction of flesh and metal, then started the engine, the low rumble providing background noise to his thoughts. Tapping his fingers on the thin ridges of the black steering wheel, Hannibal considered his next move.

-Espoir-

Will lifted the key up slightly as he turned it in the cracked keyhole, a manoeuvre he'd gotten used to doing just to get the door open. He used his elbow and knee to open the door as he turned the faded brass handle. The door flung open with force, although Will stopped it from making another dent in his apartment wall, quickly hooking his foot around the edge.

He closed the door behind him as walked in. His roommate, as per usual, is slumped in front of the TV, their mutual agreement to not acknowledge each other still intact.

Will walks to his room, deciding to take his shoes off in an orderly fashion tonight to avoid the problem of one shoe being missing that occurred this morning. He hangs up his new coat by the hood, on the edge of a shelf, peels off his hole-ridden socks and tucks them into his shoes. The floor is just as cold as he'd imagined, Will just couldn't wait for how much worse the bathroom was going to be. This was preparation though, like working up tolerance to poison. The chilled air of the general vicinity felt unfamiliar on his skin. Will missed the warmth of his workplace. *No.* It wasn't the temperature that he missed. It was a warmth he longed for, just not in the physical sense.

The towel from this morning was draped across Will's bed, still somehow damp from his previous shower. The shirt he slept in last night was laid out next to it, so Will decided it would be a smart idea to just change into it in the bathroom, rather than praying his roommate wouldn't decide to finally acknowledge him when he was half naked and wet from the shower. Will nearly grimaced at the thought.

Sure, his roommate wasn't *ugly*, in fact, Will decided the most fitting word to describe the young man was 'greasy'. Sure, there was evidence of the poor guy taking showers, Will knew this from the wet footprints he'd occasionally come across when trying to use the bathroom. But something made Will want to assume that his roommate sat there watching the hot water run out, dunked his feet in for a few seconds, then went about his day. Will was never one to judge someone's state of hygiene, the events of his childhood had caused him to be less judgemental with people whose situations he recognized.

But that was the issue. Will's roommate wasn't in a 'bad situation.' He owned a collection of expensive electric guitars along with branded amps to match. He constantly ordered takeout - which of course, Will never dared to eat - and was out with friends most nights. The guy may have not been 'Hannibal-rich', but he still had money to spend.

Will pictured the man's chest length, knotted, blonde hair, his unshaved stubble and acne covered face. The stubble wasn't always a bad choice of looks, for example, Hannibal's face

said *'Sorry about the unshaved face, I was too busy picking out which one of my prada suits best matched the shade of black on my shoes and lost track of time.'* Will's roommate's five o'clock shadow did in fact, not quite say that.

Now of course, Will had to sprint past his roommate and pretend he wasn't just talking the most shit about him in his mind. Shouldn't be too hard.

The curly haired man shut his door behind him, towel slung over one shoulder, t-shirt in hand and headed to the bathroom door. Just as expected, the greasy man didn't spare Will even a glance, his eyes glued to their shitty box TV.

The door of the bathroom, like any other door in the building, had to be opened using your entire body weight. After Will managed to finally get into the bathroom, he did his usual 'elastic band connected to a nail in the wall to lock the door' trick, reached over the cracked bathtub and turned on the shower.

Stripping his clothes as he waits hopefully for just a drop of slightly warm water, Will notices how much his mind is working. All throughout the day, the loud monologue in his head had barely spoken. But now, without the dull of Hannibal's presence, it was back to its normal garish self.

Will attempted to not allow the cold thoughts of the morning penetrate his skin as he stepped himself into the water. It was warmer than this morning, practically a pleasant burn. Obviously, it was a barely noticeable difference, however a change is still a change.

The dirt of today washed down the clogged, rusty drain as Will scrubbed himself with his ration of soap and his bare hands. He thinks of today. He thinks of Hannibal.

What was Hannibal doing right now? Was he still driving home? Was he already home, perhaps doing the same thing as Will right now?

The thought of Hannibal taking a shower at the same time brought heat to the cold room.

Will's brain instantly went to using his vast imagination to conjure up that image. Hannibal looked so pleasing in those flamboyant suits, they were clearly difficult to pull off and definitely wouldn't look good on everyone. Of course Hannibal would be able to pull off *every look*. Especially one so lacking in clothes.

Will would be lying to himself if he said he hadn't thought about it once today. Just for a second, before quickly casting the indecent thought aside whilst *in front* of the man it was about.

Hannibal naked. Surely anybody who came into contact with the tall man would've thought about it at some point. Right?

The man's broad shoulders, along with the well tailored waistcoat showing off his equally proportionate chest. Will's mind was instantly cast back to Hannibal fixing his tie in the coffee shop. The way his long fingers clung around the fabric, showing off the veins just

below the man's tanned knuckles, pulling down his shirt collar slightly, making the perfect skin around Hannibal's collar bones *very visible* for the rest of their conversation.

Will's mind had unknowingly captured the moment so perfectly. Subconsciously saving it for when he was alone. And thank the lord he had.

Hands reaching down towards his lower body, Will cast his mind to the image of Hannibal showering alongside him. The man's well-manicured hands curling around Will's wet body, feeling and worshipping every inch - stopping in every place Will liked. Taking his take to explore the vast area of slippery skin and sucking deep marks across Will's collar bones. Will nearly moaned at the thought, bringing his own hand down to his own length.

Will's intuition told him he was definitely much *smaller* than Hannibal - and not just in height. This thought brought him to full hardness, his hand now jerking himself off at an average pace, fingertips sliding attentively up and down his cock. Will's eyes were closed, the darkness of his eyelids shifting into a much more pleasant scene of the handsome man.

His pace quickened, hands sliding back and forth quickly with the help of the water. His thumb rubbed itself over the slit of the head as his unoccupied hand swiftly moved to cover his mouth. Preventing himself from moaning out Hannibal's name, like a sweet poison on his tongue.

Will slipped two fingers into his own mouth, tongue rolling around the edges of his knuckles and bitten nails. The thought of Hannibal's hand jerking him off, along with the feeling of something long and smooth deepthroating him was nearly enough to tip Will off the edge. He knew what he was doing was creepy. It wasn't the most normal thing to silently jerk off to the guy you met yesterday, but hey, wasn't everyone in London about 'not conforming to societal norms' now. Will remembered when he had a phase like that. Calling himself punk from ages 16-18 and going around pretending that listening to a couple of guys play their instruments really loudly was the same as overthrowing the government.

His hand from his mouth trailed down to his chest. His fingers pulled gently on the metal bars piercing his nipples. Will imagined Hannibal's reaction to Will's non-visible piercings. Hannibal's staring in the elevator didn't go unnoticed. At first, Will was embarrassed as he thought the taller man had been staring at the scar on his neck, however on closer inspection, it appeared Hannibal had been staring at the old piercings in Will's ear.

He wondered if Hannibal had liked the thought of Will rocking the punk look, if he did, Will was willing to run out to the nearest, open store and buy some hairspray. He'd have a freshly done mohawk by the time they next met.

Will pulled again, this time less gently, on one of his piercings. Biting his lip fiercely to stop his own noises. His back arched as his breath grew heavier, as his hands became quicker and chased his own nirvana.

Hannibal hadn't once left his mind during these few minutes. Whether it was his face, body or hands, it was all stapled into Will's brain - photocopied and printed over and over again.

A small, barely audible noise escaped Will's mouth as he rolled his nipple piercings in his fingers. It was quiet, yet it surprised Will. He'd obviously seen his share of sex scenes and porn over movies and in magazines. But that all looked so fake. The noise that just came from himself felt real. Of course Will had jerked off before, but he'd never even felt the urge to make a noise. Jerking off was just something that happened. He was a horny teenager once, of course, but he'd never felt pleasure *like this*.

Will's orgasm threatened to arrive faster as the image of Hannibal's body planted itself in his mind. Those hands focusing solely on Will's satisfaction and aiming to make Will cum, that voice whispering sweet promises in his ears in between heavy kisses, bruising Will's bare neck.

That was it, the thought of Hannibal marking Will, letting the world know that Hannibal, *established, rich kid, med school, Hannibal*, had chosen to claim Will publicly threw him over the edge. Will's calloused hands caressed his own cock so gently, yet he quickened his pace, matching the rapidness of his breath. A rope of white spurted from Will, cumming hard as a string of words muttered uncontrollably from his mouth.

"Hah.. Hannibal.."

Will's back was slumped against the tiled shower wall, his knees bent slightly as he leaned in exhaustion. Orgasm hit him like a bus. His eyelids fluttered as he attempted to open them under the cold rain of water, legs shaking under his own touch.

The sting of freezing water leaking into his eyes makes Will snap back into an even colder reality.

Fuck.

Will had just masturbated to the only friend he'd ever made.

How on earth was he supposed to face Hannibal now? They were supposed to go to a party tomorrow. Will was now going to spend the entire event trying not to confess how he jacked off to the thought of the poor guy in the shower. *What a great friend he was.*

The shaking in Will's legs had slowly turned into shivering, letting himself know it was probably time to douse himself in some soap and get out as quickly as possible.

Every action Will did felt unreal. Reaching for the near-empty bottle of soap, his only thoughts were, *you just jacked yourself off to Hannibal with that hand*. Washing himself off, his hands ghosting over his chest, the new sensitivity in his nipples a constant reminder of the events that had just gone down. Will was sure that he'd never be able to take another shower without thinking of what he just did.

Was he ashamed? *Of fucking course.*

Did he regret it? *Not really, no.*

The water soon began to feel numbing, which was a possible sign that Will should get out of the shower.

The rusty tap squeaked as Will turned it off, climbing out and immediately reaching for his hold-riddled towel, feeling his body's warmth in full show without the dull of the cold water. He dries himself off in the bathroom, the best option being to get dressed in there like he decided. The thought of his roommate seeing him half naked was already uncomfortable enough. But him seeing Will half naked right after he had fucked himself into the next universe over, that really didn't sound like something very pleasing. God knows if the sound of the shower had covered up the noises.

The only thing Will could do was to not think about it. Time couldn't be reversed, what had happened, happened. He couldn't go back and un-jerk himself off to Hannibal. Will didn't exactly feel guilty about jacking himself to a friend. He felt bad about masturbating to *Hannibal*. Hannibal compared to Will is like a rich lady's groomed, white cat next to an unwashed, flea-ridden stray dog. *Will of course being the dog.*

That small, locked away part of Will wanted Hannibal to find out about this. Just to see his reaction. He *wanted* Hannibal to know that the best pleasure Will had ever pulled from himself was to the thought of the older man, naked and in the shower.

Then again, the more rational, decision making part of Will really did not want Hannibal to ever find out about this. No one should ever know, Will should just forget about it. He should quit his job and move so Hannibal would never find him again. That way Will would never risk accidentally revealing just a small detail. Hannibal was smart, that much was evident. He wouldn't be surprised if Hannibal had already figured out Will's tells. *Not even Will knew what they were.*

Maybe the whole moving away and quitting his job part was a little excessive, still, right now the best option was to just not think about it too hard. What's done is done.

Will slipped his shirt over his nearly-dry torso, along with a pair of old sweatpants. Not bringing underwear wasn't something Will had even thought about when quickly swiping clothes off his floor. But now, that decision felt as if it would cost Will his entire dignity and pride. Who knows? That beautiful image Will's imagination had thought up could very easily slide back into his brain at any given moment, then what would he do? Awkwardly sprint into his room, pretending he wasn't hard whilst praying to God that his roommate didn't look in his general vicinity. That's exactly what he'd do. Then he'd shamelessly jerk himself off *again* under his covers, repeating the exact situation once again. Only this time, with twice as much to be ashamed about.

Tossing the image of Hannibal out of his mind temporarily, Will unhooked the elastic from the door, slung his wet towel over his shoulder and put on his best *'I was just having a strangely long shower'* act.

Will took forensics, not drama.

He kept his eyes locked ahead, the quick tapping of his feet seemed to take over the sound of the TV. Of course Will had somehow made himself the most noticeable thing in the room.

The short walk from one door to another seemed to become a hike. Seconds lasted hours as his bedroom door ran further and further away.

What could've possibly been years later, Will successfully reached his bedroom without making eye contact with his roommate. The feeling of the faded brass on his palm as he turned the door handle was the second most pleasurable thing he'd felt in a while.

Will draped his towel over a radiator. It was pointless really, just a hunk of cold metal taking up space. Even if the heating was on, Will doubted the radiator even worked.

He tossed himself on the bed, lying above the covers for a moment. For the first time in many months, he didn't feel absolutely freezing in the apartment. His cheeks still felt warm, along with his hands. From what Will could understand, his body really hadn't calmed down from the *events* in the shower. He wasn't complaining of course, warmth was warmth. How he had achieved it wasn't something he wanted to dwell on for too long.

Pulling the covers over himself as he tucked his unshaven legs into the bed, Will mapped out tomorrow's schedule in his head. First class of the day was at six, he'd wake up at five-thirty and pray the buses were actually on time. He'd have a break at one-thirty, an hour window to go to a charity shop and find a blazer and a tie for Hannibal's strange engagement-but-not-really party. Then, he'd have classes from two-thirty to five. Then another hour's break and finally, a two hour long lecture. Will knew the only thing that'd get him through that torture session would be the thought of Hannibal coming to get him straight after. He'd be in the warmth of the older man's Rolls Royce in no time.

Although, getting into the guy he'd jerked off to the night before's car did seem like a strange move. Especially when said guy was someone he'd known for about 24 hours.

Will couldn't let these thoughts keep him up, he tried his best to switch off his thoughts, boring his mind with the replacement thought of his professor's draining voice.

Hopefully this time tomorrow, Will'd be right where he is now, lying in his bed. Only with the relief of knowing he didn't randomly blurt out that he'd viciously jerked it to the thought of Hannibal's body. Now that'd really be the dream. *Wouldn't it.*

Chapter End Notes

Also if anyone had ever played through Sally Face, I imagine Will's flat to be a similar building to the apartment building from the game, (minus the whole demon problem they had going on).

Chapter 6

The time was twenty-past-one. Ten minutes before Will would head out to every charity shop nearby in an attempt to find a decent looking outfit for tonight. A million thoughts rushed along with the anticipation, a flowing river inside his palace. These thoughts contained everything from a structured plan of what he would do if someone at Hannibal's fancy party approached him, to panicked flashes of last night's events.

He checks the time every few minutes, the clock hands passing slowly on the wall.

Eventually, it hits half past and Will starts to pack up. He knew he'd be on his feet a lot of the day, so thankfully he'd packed lightly this morning. Just a pen in his coat pocket, along with some cash. The only contents of his bag was his ancient laptop. The notebooks and textbooks had been left behind today, leaving room for anything he'd have to purchase for tonight's events.

Keeping his head down as he walks through the halls and out the campus. Muscle memory guided him through the winding paths, only lifting his head when he reached the bus stop to check how many people were predicted to get on with him. Only three thankfully. He'd let them get on first, yet still keep close behind so the driver knows how long he'd be waiting for.

Like clockwork, the bus arrives, Will allows the three other people to pass ahead of him as he walks a short distance behind the third person.

Will taps his pass as he surveys the bus for seats. The lunch rush of people seems to have ended, leaving many seats empty. He decided on one towards the back, but still close to the middle. The bus is quiet, apart from the loud hum of the powerful engine. Nobody on an unnecessarily loud phone call, no screaming babies and no overly energetic teenagers.

-Espoir-

The first shop Will decides to walk into is for cancer research. All profits go to funding of scientific research in cancer. Will had never known anyone who had cancer, so it wasn't personal, therefore, he didn't care much for it. Still, it was a good cause - personal or not. The shelves and railings are organised by colour and types of clothing. For example, red shirts, then yellow shirts, etc. Will likes this organisation. It was practical for his case.

He used his knuckle to flip through the textiles, the feeling of the scratchy fabrics sending an odd sensation through his teeth and under his skin. Will unconsciously wiped his palm on the chest of his shirt every couple of seconds, the thought of touching other people's clothes had always left an ugly feeling on his fingers.

Who's to say they had been washed? Of course, Will knew he practically lived in unwashed clothes. But it was different. Those were *his* unwashed clothes, untouched by anyone other than himself.

Will gravitates towards the 'black' section of jackets. He wasn't yet ready to branch out to a colourful suit, those were clearly already trade-marked by Hannibal.

The rack was filled with a majority of women's winter coats, fake leather jackets with fake zips in unneeded places and hoodies with random American city names printed on the back.

Clearly this shopping trip was going to be a little more difficult then Will had once anticipated.

Working his way through all the black sections of the clothing, it was clear that finding something so simple was going to become a real challenge.

Will was very aware that he could easily ask a staff member if they had any sort of piece of clothing that went towards a normal black suit. However, that would require Will to be social - and so far, Will had very well succeeded on the no-social-interaction part of his journey, he wasn't about to let all his effort go to waste of his own accord.

After Will found himself flipping through the racks, and somewhat considering buying a green and black chequered waistcoat, he knew it was time to give up and move on to the next shop. He didn't exactly feel like showing up to the party looking like he was about to load into a nintendo game.

Slipping out the door and back onto the stone covered pavement of the highstreet, Will quickly surveys the street for his next location.

Thankfully, he notices a small building across the street. The front is fully windowed, a decal of two cats covered the middle of the left side.

Will nearly smiled to himself, he desperately hoped this shop would be the successful one. If not, he'd probably get something small just for the sake of it. The money is donated to animal shelters. He isn't sure how he'd never come across the small building before, there's no way Will had lived here for practically a year now and hadn't decided to investigate.

Either way, he walks in, there was no door in the small entryway. Just ropes of beads that Will pushed aside with the back of his hand. The small beads made a satisfying noise as they collided together.

The clothing isn't organised by colour like the previous shop. Instead, just by items of clothing. It wasn't the aesthetic of it that bothered Will, just the practicality. Right now, he was looking for a very specific thing, so the best thing for his search would be a well-organised display for Will's situation.

Will wanted to look presentable as Hannibal's 'plus-one' so he knew he couldn't settle for any old piece of fabric.

He made his way over to the jackets like last time, desperately praying in his mind for something to go his way today.

Again, using his knuckle to flip through the clothing, Will searches for any black amongst the fabrics.

It wasn't like Will was shopping for clothes just because he needed some new clothes. No. He was on a tight schedule here. He had to be back at his university in under two hours and *needed* to find something presentable in that time frame. There was no *'there's always tomorrow'* it was now or nothing. And nothing just wasn't going to cut it.

Will was well aware of Hannibal's offer to bring Will to a tailor and have a custom suit whipped up for him just before the party. But Will assumed it was just that annoying thing that people seemed to do, where they offer something *just to be polite* and get upset when you actually take them up on the offer. And now of course, Will couldn't be doing anything that would cause Hannibal to change his feelings about him in any way. No risks were being taken today.

As if the gods were tuning into Will's panicked thoughts, he struck gold. Or - in better words - he struck black fabric.

Pulling the hanger out from the crowded rack, Will has to stop himself from smiling. It was a black blazer, along with a grey waistcoat on the same hanger.

Possibly a set? Will wonders to himself as he checks the labels.

He was right of course, both of the same brand, both in Will's size.

He inspects the blazer closely, discovering a small rip in the lining - nothing a bit of duct tape wouldn't fix. The waistcoat was in practically pristine condition, except for a mission button in the middle, but apart from that, no stains or rips could be found.

There was already a white button up collecting dust in Will's closet back in his room, so that was three items already checked off the list. Worst comes to worst, Hannibal would only be paying for a tailored pair of slacks and some new shoes.

Although, it seemed those gods who had previously treated Will were still tuned into his brain.

Moving to look through the selection of men's trousers, Will notices a pair of grey dress shoes on the floor by a rack of CDs. He quickly scurries over to check the sizing on these perfect shoes.

Now, in no way was Will a religious man. However, with the way things have been going for him lately, there may be a god.

Flipping the shoe over to check the sole, Will saw the writing and had to stop himself from smiling again. He picked the shoes up and made his way over to the men's trousers.

Everything was going so well. Will wondered when someone was going to come up and stab him a few times - surely his luck was going to come to a disappointing plummet at one point.

He wasn't disappointed as he checked the small selection of clothing and found nothing. The point was, today had been successful no matter what happens next. Although, Will knew he couldn't exactly show up in three quarters of a suit and black jeans. He'd end up looking like all of the men from his hometown whenever they were forced into a wedding or a funeral.

Walking to pay, Will digs into his pocket for a twenty pound note.

The volunteer by the cash register is a younger woman. Possibly a teenager on work experience or something. She gives Will a small smile as he sets his items on the counter.

"Will this be everything?" Her voice is sweet and matches her joyful expression. Will doesn't want to seem like an asshole so he gives his best attempt to match her.

He gives her a polite smile in exchange as he speaks. "Er, yeah. Thanks."

The girl scans the tags of the three clothing items, she makes a surprised expression as she scans the blazer and waistcoat set.

Panic begins to leak into Will's mind. Was she going to give him some sort of reason as to why Will couldn't purchase them? Was he going to have to re-do his entire search from scratch? With the current time frame, Will really couldn't afford to go running around town for something so specific.

"It seems these two items are part of some sort of designer brand, although due to the condition I don't think I should have you pay the recommended amount for them.." Her face contorts as she thinks about her next move.

"Oh, okay. How much is everything gonna be then?" Will doesn't care if the clothes he was wearing came from a halloween costume, he just needs them *now.*

"Well, with the shoes and everything, I'll ring you up for let's say… fifteen quid?"

Will had very well expected her to say fifty rather than fifteen, but he wasn't exactly complaining. He was starting to hope this streak of luck didn't run out as soon as he met with Hannibal.

"Yeah- yeah, that's perfect. Thanks." The smile he gave the girl was nearly genuine this time. Will slipped the twenty onto the counter. He waited in silence as she pulled Will's change out and placed the clothes into a plain, white plastic bag.

"Have a nice day." She said with that same smiley expression as Will collected his change and new items.

"Thanks, you too." He nodded in acknowledgement at the young girl, turning on his heel and heading towards the door, one hand stuffing his change into a coat pocket, his other hand occupied with the bag.

Repeating the same ritual of walking out the building and scanning the streets for his next location, Will spots the familiar red tint of a British Heart Foundation shop.

Walking a few buildings down, Will walks over to the shop and pushes the glass door open.

He moves quickly to the rack of men's trousers, as if his luck was actually on a time limit.

And maybe it very well was on a time limit because there was just no damn way Will managed to find a pair of black slacks in his size so quickly.

He takes the hanger of the railing and holds them up to his own legs. It didn't matter if the waist was too big, he always had a belt on hand, however, it would possibly become a problem if the hem of his trouser legs swept the floor. Although, to Will's surprise once again, there didn't seem to be any problems. They have a bit of discolouration on the side of the waistband, but it'll probably be covered by the blazer anyway.

Wanting this ever-so-exciting adventure to come to an end as soon as it could, Will glances at the price tag to check if it was over a fiver, then heads over to the counter.

Will buys the slacks, happy about his oddly successful shopping trip - especially one that cost him £28.

The whole trip took about twenty minutes, meaning Will had enough time to grab something from the nearest McDonalds and get on a bus back to his campus. He'd quite familiar with the layout of this town so navigating to the nearest fast-food place wasn't difficult.

Digging out another five pound note from his pocket, Will orders a medium fries and a bottle of water - ordering only something that would fulfil his hunger, not for enjoyment. McDonalds was cheap and filling. Sure, it wasn't a healthy option, but it wasn't as if Will could do a weekly shop and pack a fulfilling, healthy meal for lunch everyday.

Collecting his order as it's read out, he sits off to the side in the small building. Placing his bag of new found clothes by his feet. The building is about as busy as you'd expect. Every other table being filled, teenagers shouting over each other, children crying.

Will attempts to block out most of it as he lets his thoughts take over his body momentarily. He thinks about how what he's had for lunch in the past days has been very different. A home cooked meal by someone who was clearly ready to open up a Michelin star restaurant, then followed by some cheap fast food covered in way too much salt for one human being to be consuming in one sitting.

He thinks about Hannibal. About how they'll see each other in a few hours time. Then he thinks about how he'll face Hannibal. Will had nearly forgotten about his nightly activities.

His thoughts are interrupted by the sudden remembrance of being in public, he looks up from the table at his surroundings. There's a group of people who look about Will's age. He

recognizes two of them as people he's accidentally made eye contact with from his campus. The other three he doesn't recognize.

The two from his school are a girl and a boy, possible twins with the similarities in their features. Fair skinned, blue eyed, straight blonde hair. The other three consisted of another girl and two boys.

The boys in the group were all dressed in a similar fashion. Either a solid colour pullover, paired with Levi's jeans. Along with a chain around their neck and some form of sports shoes. A wannabe Leonardo Dicaprio.

Or the other end of the stick. A lakers baseball jersey, Levi's shorts - even in Winter of course - and of course a pair of sports shoes. This is all paired with an extensive amount of jewellery. Rings, chains around the neck, wallet chains, watches, etc.

A rich boy's attempt at poor man's fashion.

The girls were no different. Two of the girls dressed in at least one fur item. Tight pencil skirts, low cut shirts, heels so high - Will didn't even want to imagine the state of their feet after a night out - and of course the staple copious amounts of jewellery.

The other girl looked like she had just bought everything she saw in a spice girls music video. Red leather trousers, black and white platform converse, a tight fitting long sleeved shirt and a haircut that did nothing for her face shape.

In short, they were rich kids who's fashion sense was to copy.

As soon as they realised Will had looked their way, they all whipped their heads in the opposite direction and broke out in a fit of laughter. Their cackles echoed and bounced off the cold, stone walls of Will's mind.

Will had been bullied all throughout school, so kids like this weren't anything new, just unexpected in his adult life. He'd always told himself his life would magically get better as soon as he was out of his teenage years of school. Clearly he was wrong.

Will looked away as well, his head facing the greasy table.

He took sips of his drink. He was no longer looking at the group, but could still hear them. Hushed whispers in between fits of laughter.

Will felt alone again. Usually he'd be fine with this feeling. Brush it off and tell himself to get used to it. But not this time. Will didn't want to feel alone. He wanted to see Hannibal. He wanted to be at work. He wanted to be sat down with Hannibal at that god forsaken coffee shop.

He casts his mind back to last night. He remembers when that rude customer came in, and how Hannibal had tricked the man into embarrassment by claiming Will was his husband and

how they owned the shop. Although his mind focuses on the part where Hannibal claimed him and Will were married.

Will hadn't ever thought too hard about his future. He'd only gone off that he wanted to get a scholarship to study abroad. That's about the only thing he'd had a goal and worked towards. He'd only very recently decided that he may want to go into the FBI academy. Although, never had he seen marriage, or a family as a goal. It just wasn't something Will could ever see himself doing.

He knew his Father wouldn't settle for him marrying anyone other than some unemployed girl from a rich family. He'd always been trying to push Will into making friends with the girls from the wealthy families in town.

Even if Will was into girls, he'd never find himself marrying someone like that. So the idea of marrying a man was off the table. He'd accepted this fact years ago.

But to imagine a life like that, could be fun.

Especially a life like that, with a man like Hannibal.

Will lets these positive thoughts take control of himself, blocking out his surroundings as he spaces out.

He imagines living with this man. He imagines their wedding day. He imagines going out on dates with this man. He imagines going on vacations with this man. He imagines spending the holidays with this man. He imagines growing old with this man. He imagines being happy with his man.

He imagines Hannibal.

Just like every thought Will has like this, he knows he should be ashamed of himself. But he can't stop himself, he doesn't want to stop himself. These fantasies were the only thoughts in his mind palace powerful enough to push everything else out.

The panic Will had previously felt suddenly rose in temperatures he knew weren't safe. The girl from Will's university had stood up. She had stood up and walked over to Will.

Without looking up with his head, Will heard the girl pull out the chair opposite him and take a seat.

Her voice is high pitched and straight up annoying. Like the British version of the girl's from LA that loved to tease Will in middle school. Her accent was posh, clearly from the rich side of London, probably in university with daddy's money.

"Hey, I know this is like… so weird. But would you like to come to a party with me tonight." She glances from Will to her group of friends, giggling as she speaks between words. "Like a date or something?"

Will takes a sip of his water, still not making eye contact with the girl.

She takes his silence as an opportunity to keep talking at him, instead of leaving. “I’ve seen you around campus a lot. Just never had the courage to ask you out.”

So she does recognise Will from university.

“What gave you the courage now?” Will says it more like a statement than a question, keeping his expression blank.

Her smiley facade slips momentarily as Will’s snarky remark dodges her question.

“Come on, at least tell me your name. I’m loving the whole mysterious thing you’ve got going on here, maybe bringing you out to a party will help me *crack it*.” She leans forward onto the table as she speaks the last two words, her low cut shirt showing off much more than Will would prefer to see.

He averts his eyes from looking down to looking at her forehead. Still, his head doesn’t move so it’s more like he’s looking through his own eyebrows.

“I’m busy tonight, sorry.” It isn’t a lie of course. Will was genuinely busy. Still, even if he wasn’t he’d probably still say the same thing.

To Will’s dismay, the girl just won’t take the hint and her piercing voice infiltrates his ears once again.

“Trust me I’ve heard that one before. The party will be fun - you’ll have a good time trust me!”

“You’re not my type.” Again, the girl’s bubbly persona slips away - for a few seconds this time. *Clearly hadn’t heard that one before.*

She puts her hand on her chest in a fake offence. “Wow, hurt! Why don’t you just give me a chance - a reward for me working up the courage to ask you.”

Will did not like this girl. She was just another copy of every other girl who had done this to Will. Ask the quiet boy on a date, get him to accept, don’t show up for said date, laugh.

“Look.” Will was already done with this girl, he just wanted her to get the memo and fuck off. “I really don’t think it would work out between us.”

“Oh please,” She reaches out and strokes Will’s arm with her manicured fingertips. “Give me one good reason why.”

Will quickly retracts his arm away from her touch and sighs. For the first time in the conversation, he locks eyes with her. “Because my type, *is men*.”

The girl stifles a laugh and rolls her eyes. Clearly she’s finally realised that her target wasn’t going to fall for her tricks. “Right.” She finally gets up, her white heels clicking on the tiled floor as she walks back to her group of friends.

Will takes this as his chance to get going, he'd eaten nearly all his fries and drank half his water. He pockets the bottle of water and gets up.

As he throws the remaining contents of his food in the bin, he can hear giggles and whispers from behind him.

Like always, Will had no other choice but to ignore it.

However, as he starts to quickly shuffle himself through the crowd of people by the door someone yells over the herd of people - his voice audible over everything else.

"She didn't want you anyway fag!"

It isn't the first time an incident like this has happened, but for some reason it hurts a lot more than usual.

Heads turn to look at him, Will turns around to where the voice came from.

The boy is sitting on top of one the booths, a glass bottle of coke in hand as he smiles mockingly at Will.

Will's world stops as he stares back. He keeps his expression blank, his face luckily being one of the only things he seems to have control over. He can't even bring himself to move his body. He takes in the group's faces, keeping a mental note of everyone's features. He doesn't know why he does it, it just seems necessary.

Everything around Will feels much slower, like the thoughts in his head are moving faster than time itself.

Maybe everyone was right. Will knew he wasn't normal, but he wasn't the freak people made him out to be. Sure he was a little different, but it's not like everyone else is perfect. But maybe they were. Maybe this whole time, Will had been convincing himself that he wasn't the odd man out, because he knew deep down it was the truth.

All his life, he'd always felt somewhat different. People were always telling him that the feelings he felt weren't real - maybe they were right. He is a freak. He is a fag. He isn't his Father's son. He didn't deserve anything he had. Nobody was going to remember him when he dies.

Without another word, Will turns and walks out.

He was well aware of everyone's eyes on him, the laughs scattering from different groups throughout the building. How some of those people most definitely went to his university.

Get used to it.

It's what Will had always told himself, like a mantra he'd repeat in his head. A prayer to recite when things weren't looking too bright.

-Espoir-

It was the last class of the day. Since the incident during Will's lunchbreak, he'd been an autopilot, navigating the day through routines and muscle memory, writing down whatever his professor says or doing his own thing.

He'd spent his 5 o'clock break on his laptop in the study hall, researching whatever he could find on that serial killer from Florence. The school library didn't have anything on the case, which was fair. It was too recent to be in a book yet and clearly not much research had ever been done despite the severity of the events.

Now with five minutes left of the lecture, Will was continuing with his findings. He'd managed to put together a lengthy word document on the information he'd come up with about the killer. From lengthy descriptions and annotations of the crime scenes, to pages dedicated to Will's own theories of Il Mostro's decisions.

Il Mostro was meticulous, leaving no clues at his crime scenes. Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi worked tirelessly on the case and enlisted the profiling techniques of the FBI.

He arranged his victims in such beautiful tableaus, Will found himself staring at the crime scene photos for extended amounts of time. Taking in all the small details. The killer was clearly young, his techniques being that of an amateur. Although, the man the FBI had accused and given 40 years to was far from young. Will was counting the days before they realised he was clearly not the true killer. The FBI would fall into disgrace if it went public.

The man who had be accused was still a criminal, originally given time for rape and abuse against his fiance and two daughters.

A mind like that was nowhere close to conjuring up such beautiful pieces of art. This man's mind was dull and uninteresting. Il Mostro was beautiful. Atleast, his mind - his mind was beautiful.

Will was so sick of having to keep these thoughts to himself. It was normal human nature to want to share your findings with other people. This was different though. Will couldn't tell just anyone how he was basically attracted to a serial killer's brain. He was pretty sure that'd be the thing to finally send him into the loony bin.

Though, perhaps there was someone.

Will casts his memory back to the conversation he had in Hannibal's kitchen. He called a killer's victim 'artwork' in front of Hannibal. Yet, instead of kicking Will out and writing a cheque for the nearest therapist's office, Hannibal did quite the opposite. He assured Will that he was enjoying their conversation. He even said that he found Will *interesting*.

Will's train of thoughts were cut short by the sound of rustling and footsteps. He looked down to check the time on his laptop, and finally, it was time to leave.

Saving his progress, Will slung his coat over his arms, then shoved the laptop into his practically empty bag.

Walking through the old hallways of the university, Will found himself hearing a familiar shriek of laughter as he went to turn a corner. It became very clear Will's lucky streak had broken many hours ago when he discovered the source of the noise. It was the same group from earlier, they had clearly all met up to get ready for that *'party'* that apparently was going on tonight.

Before he could be spotted, Will quickly decided to spin around and half-run the other direction. Taking a different exit really couldn't hurt. *What was three extra minutes in the grand scheme of things?*

It actually took four minutes, however Will did avoid being hate-crimed twice in one day. So really, a win is a win.

The sky is already dark, not pitch black, but the street lights are on. The air is its usual freezing temperature, forcing Will to regret not wearing an extra five layers of clothing.

As he finally makes his way out the premacy and towards the street, Will spots a familiar figure standing by the edge of the road. Although, that luxury car Will had longed to see was nowhere in sight. Perhaps Hannibal hadn't been able to get as good a parking space as yesterday.

Hannibal isn't looking at Will, instead he's checking his watch. Will wonders for a second how much money the older man has just wrapped around his wrist. Perhaps the watch was worth more than where Will lived, he didn't put it past Hannibal, especially after discovering the place he called 'home'.

Eventually, he looks up and sees Will. They both instantly smile at each other. All the worry and stress Will had felt just a few minutes ago was sent running far away.

Still locked in that joyful expression, Hannibal begins to walk towards Will, meeting him in the middle. "Will, how lovely it is to see you again– may I?" Hannibal points to Will's hand - the one carrying his new clothes.

He barely has time to respond before Hannibal is reaching out and taking it from him. "Well- no- no, it's okay you don't have to do that." Will laughs.

Hannibal rewards him with the smile Will is so fond of. The genuine one, where his oddly sharp teeth poke through the sides of his lips every so slightly. "Really, I insist. Just a small notion for dragging you out to this event tonight."

For a moment Will protests, he only manages to get a few stumbles of words out before Hannibal brings his finger up to his lip, signifying Will to be quiet. And of course, Will wasn't going to protest. He laughs again, then he realises Hannibal is something very different to his usual formal suit.

He hasn't discarded the patterned slacks or matching dress shoes. Instead, Hannibal's usual blazer has been replaced with a leather jacket. And in no way is Will complaining about the switch. Somehow it made the taller man look more human, the full suits did sort of make Hannibal look like a character from a government office TV show, again, not in a bad way. The leather really was a lovely edition. Will almost found his face reddening as he studied the zipped up jacket, the black material stretching over Hannibal's broad chest. In Will's opinion, *he looks sexy.*

"Was your day as exciting as you hoped?" Will is brought out his Hannibal-infused daze with a smooth accented voice.

"Funnily enough, even more exciting than I expected." He spoke as he began to follow Hannibal, letting the older man take the lead as they walked side by side.

"I really do want to hear every detail although–" They come to a stop by the edge of the curb. "--it may have to wait until we arrive at your home."

Will is confused by what Hannibal meant, he began to draw his own conclusions until he realised what the taller man had led them to. The two men were standing in front of a sleek, black Triumph motorcycle. The keys are still in the bike. Will looks to Hannibal, trying to confirm his suspicions.

Hannibal did a quick raise of his eyebrows as he looked at Will's questioning eyes. "It'll be much quicker to get through traffic, you'll have more time for getting ready."

"You're telling me this is yours?" Will gestures to the motorcycle.

Hannibal nods. "Does that bother you?"

Will quickly shakes his head, shutting down Hannibal's accusation. "No no, just didn't picture you as the guy to be riding around on a motorbike."

Hannibal chuckles slightly. "Now what on earth would make you think that." He retrieves a pair of leather gloves from his jacket pockets, slipping them on before he ties the plastic bag securely to one of the handles.

"Not sure, but I think I can pinpoint a few things." Will replied, laughing softly along with Hannibal. He watches as the older man tied his belongings to the vehicle, in any other case, Will would protest that there was no way it was safe and he valued £20 worth of items enough to not tie them to a motorcycle with thin plastic. Yet, he wholeheartedly trusted Hannibal to keep his items safe and sound.

The taller man turns back to Will from the bike, handing him his own pair of leather gloves. "In case you get cold." They both smile at each other again.

Will was well aware they'd do absolutely nothing in terms of safety, it was the thought that counted of course. A couple of helmets would be the safer choice, but Will was still young, if they got into an accident Will would either die beside Hannibal, or have a cool story to tell when he's old. *Win-win situation.*

The gloves are warm, possibly from being in Hannibal's pocket, it's a comforting feeling.

Will looks up from his hands to see the leather clad man sling his leg over the bike, watching in awe as Hannibal turns to face Will. His eyebrows raised in question, his face asking Will if he's going to get on or not.

Answering the question, Will strolls closer to the bike. Hannibal offered his hand as Will walked over. Leather hand in hand, Will sat down, memories of riding on the back of his Dad's friends' bikes flooded back to him. *But that was in the past. Right now, at this moment, he is with Hannibal. And he is going to have a damn good time.* It was time for Will to stop dwelling in memories for just a moment, and create new ones. Time to stop thinking of America, time to stop thinking about last night.

Will's arm instinctively wraps around Hannibal's waist as the engine starts up.

His heart is beating fast, he's been on his fair share of motorcycles so it's not because he's scared. Being in forced close proximity with Hannibal makes Will's heart race faster than he knew it ever could. Silently praying, Will hoped the thick layer of clothing would stop Hannibal from feeling his pounding heart.

An accented voice spoke loudly over the engine. "Comfortable?"

Will felt himself grin at the small question. He posed his hand into a thumbs up, hoping Hannibal would notice the gesture from around his waist.

And apparently he did. Will found himself gripping Hannibal tightly as they sped off onto the road.

He watched people go past in a blur as Hannibal weaved through the traffic. None of those people knew that that weird guy who sat in the back of all their lectures and dressed like a father about to take their son on a fishing trip, was sitting here, clinging onto the waist of the most attractive man in the area.

Will had already assumed Hannibal was fairly popular, and after hearing about the party he'd been invited to, there was no doubt about it. He pictures it. Girls in Hannibal's classes probably fought to sit beside him, yet here Will was. Effortlessly pushed against Hannibal's back. *And all he had to do was get some shitty coffee spilt on him.*

Will enjoys the ride, it's been years since he'd felt the familiar rush of adrenaline.

Eventually, they come to stop at a red light. Hannibal turns his head to face Will. His hair is unstyled and windswept, falling over his forehead rather than being styled back.

They lock eyes for a few seconds, Hannibal smiling. Will uncontrollably mirrors the expression.

They don't say anything, their voices wouldn't be heard over the roar of the engine anyway.

Hannibal winks before looking away and revving the engine, speeding through cars, overtaking them. Will laughs, Hannibal can hear it because it's right in his ear. Luckily the

quick change in speeds had caused Will's head to rest on the back of Hannibal's shoulder.

Eventually, they reach Will's road. Hannibal parks the bike in the nearest free space.

Hannibal is the first to get off, kicking out the stand of the bike then standing up. He turns and offers Will a hand.

Will, of course, can very easily get off by himself, but it's not hurting to get a little help.

Again, leather hand in hand, Hannibal helps Will off the bike, watching his slim legs swing over the sides.

"Why thank you, kind Doctor." Will says teasingly, their hands pulling apart as he finds his footing.

Hannibal moves from Will back to the bike. "Anytime, kind Detective." He unties the plastic bag from the handlebars but doesn't make a move to hand it back to Will.

The two men smile at their ongoing joke of nickname, Hannibal turning back to the vehicle and opening a small compartment in the back to get out a blazer as he smiles to himself fondly.

Will's expression reflected the older man, although his blissful enjoyment is quickly brought to a halt at the realisation that Hannibal is now going to have to see his living conditions.

He knew his roommate wouldn't be home until tomorrow morning - it was a Friday - he was always out with friends on a Friday night.

It wasn't that the place was untidy, just run down. Will had always done his best to clean up after himself. He knew he probably had a few shirts on his bedroom floor. Maybe a half finished can of something on the counter. Apart from that, neither Will or his roommate were ever doing something that would make the place dirty.

Swiping the keys of the motorcycle into his pocket, Hannibal looks expectantly at Will, raising his eyebrows and tilting his head slightly.

Taking the hint, Will spoke as he turned his body towards the building. "You know, I didn't expect to be back on a bike anytime soon. But I really didn't expect the next ride I had to be on *your* motorcycle." He chuckled softly as he spoke, pushing open the heavy door as Hannibal followed behind.

Hannibal nearly found himself choking at Will's wording. The emphasis on the shorter man's words nearly had him wondering if Will had Hannibal figured out, and was doing it on purpose. "We're met with surprises every day of our lives. Some more significant than others."

"Yeah, yeah. You rocking up that leather combo really did have me surprised." Will rolled his eyes as he climbed the stairs of the breezy building, tracing his fingertips over the cracked paint covering the thin walls.

Hannibal frowned slightly from behind the man. He'd almost been so distracted by the beautiful sight just in front of his eyes, nearly missing what Will had said. "Was it a good surprise?" He heard Will chuckle from in front as they made their way up.

"You don't need to worry, it was a good surprise. Unexpected for sure, but good nonetheless." Will stood waiting, just a few steps in front, at the top of the flight of stairs.

Hannibal smiled at Will as he moved beside him. "Very well then, I'll keep that in mind."

They had reached Will's floor, of course, Hannibal had to pretend he had no clue where he was supposed to be. For all Will knew, this was his first time being inside the building.

"Now I'm going to warn you now," Will spoke as the two of them walked side by side down what could easily be a famous hallway from a horror movie. "It's not quite the same as your penthouse. Just a tad smaller with a lot more mould on the walls."

Hannibal found himself grinning again. "I'm sure I'll feel right at home."

"Well, I'll let you decide that after you see it." The shorter man protested.

Will moves to his door, fumbling for his keys in his pocket. "Now, just give me a moment…"

Hannibal watches curiously as the brunette begins his manoeuvre. First, he holds the faded brass lock together, shoving his key viciously into the keyhole. Then, as he turned the key, still holding the brass lock with his thumb, he pulled the rusty door handle upwards. And in the final move, Will used all of his body to push the door open, throwing his elbow and hip against it whilst kicking the bottom with his ankle. As strange as the ritual was, it sure worked. The stained, once white door flung open after a small moment.

Will breathed a sigh of relief for managing to enter his own flat. He turned back to Hannibal, moving his body to hold open the door for the older man.

Hannibal smiled back at Will as their eyes met momentarily. "Brilliant performance." He said as he walked past Will, nodding his head in a small thanks.

Hannibal takes the surroundings in. He hates to think he's been living in such an unnecessarily lavish way when Will has no other choice but this. The door shuts behind him as Will moves to one of the two doors Hannibal can see. He follows behind, walking into what he assumes is Will's bedroom. *Who knew he'd be making such progress so quickly?*

Hannibal would normally find it rude that he, as a guest, isn't offered a drink or any refreshments. But this is definitely one of those times where Will is the exception to his rules.

Will finds himself standing in the middle of the bare room for a moment, looking around at the surroundings. "Sorry, there's not many options for sitting. It's either the floor or the bed, your choice."

Hannibal decides to take a seat on Will's bed. It's covered by just a quilt, no cover on it, and one pillow at one end of the bed. He places the bag and his blazer beside himself, crossing his

legs over one another. The leather of the taller man's clothes rustles as he moves, placing his hands in his lap as he observes the room.

Will moves to take out the slacks out of the bag, then to his wardrobe, digging through clothes and boxes in an attempt to find a white button up shirt. "What time do we have to be there?" He asks, voice slightly muffled with half his body in a cupboard.

"It shouldn't matter if we arrive 30 minutes after the initial time, we have about an hour." Hannibal watched the back of Will as he fumbled through the small closet, eventually pulling out a white dress shirt.

Turning his head around to look at his banged up digital clock by the side of his bed, Will nodded at Hannibal's words. He silently slipped his coat off and hung it off the only shelf in his room.

Hannibal watched the man, the same way someone may watch a strange animal in a nature documentary. "You really should invest in a watch, Detective, keeping track of time comes in handy."

Will sighed as he moved across the floor. "Yeah, maybe I'll ask Santa for one for Christmas." His masked southern drawl came out slightly as he spoke.

Hannibal shrugged, pretending not to notice the slip. "Couldn't hurt to try."

"I'll fetch some spare paper now, maybe you can help me write to him." Will says sarcastically, smiling at the end of his sentence to show he wasn't trying to argue with Hannibal.

"Don't leave me waiting too long." Hannibal calls in response as Will excuses himself from the room, slacks and shirt in hand, assumingly going to get dressed - not to write letters addressed to the North Pole.

Hannibal waits patiently in Will's room. He scans the room with his eyes, looking around at everything. The walls were bare apart from a shelf. The shelf had two notebooks and a small stack of textbooks. Some being to do with criminology, human biology and forensic science.

There's a few pens along with some sheets of paper on the floor by one the walls, opposite the door.

Hannibal leans from where he's sitting to get a closer look. Making sure he can't hear Will's footsteps, he gets up to see what's on the paper.

It's printed pictures from different articles about the Il Mostro case. Hannibal smiled to himself as he read through some of Will's notes around the articles. He'd crossed out quotes from the insolent agents who had attempted to take down the killer, and rewritten what should've been said. Under a crime scene photo of a mutilated corpse the words were written

‘Wants to perform. Every brutal choice has elegance, grace. His mutilations hide the true nature of his crimes.’

Hannibal bit the inside of his lip as he smiled. Sighing deeply as he paces circles through the small space. As he waits, he stays inspecting Will’s bedroom. Then he realises he’s in Will’s bedroom. Sitting where Will sleeps. Hannibal thinks about what Will sleeps on, wondering if he sleeps naked. The thought provoking that familiar hot feeling he’d been met with a lot in the past two days.

He subconsciously swipes a hand over his crotch at the thought of sitting beside a naked Will Graham. Hannibal had thought only a few days ago that his only problem with self control was when he was faced with someone who was rude, and an idea of what he wanted for dinner that night. Although, it was now clear he had gained another issue with his self control. Hannibal could not control himself when around Will Graham. Still softly palming himself through the fabric of his patterned clothing, Hannibal thought deeply about the effects his new friend had on him.

Hannibal sensed he and Will were similarly minded. Possibly with the same ideals, beliefs and opinions of most things. He had never encountered someone so perfect. Hannibal had never been one to believe in fantasy ideas such as fate and soulmates, yet, after meeting Will, he decided it may be time to become more open with his beliefs.

The younger man had a beautiful mind. After reading small snippets of Will’s thoughts on killings, there was no doubt about it. Although, his brain wasn’t the only thing Hannibal would consider highly attractive. Will was so very attractive. Hannibal had never considered himself to have so much as a ‘type’, but if he were to have one, it’d be men with untamable, brunette hair who dressed like they were off to fix boat motors.

His hands ghosted the top of his things, now cautious and conscious of his surroundings. The pleasurable throb of his recent thoughts still thoroughly present.

Thankfully for Hannibal, his thoughts are put to an end by the man himself. Will walks back in, doing up the final button of his shirt as he pushes the door open.

His face was clean shaven, giving him that boy-next-door look you’d see in teen movies when combined with his grown out curls. The sort of face your cool older sister would have on a poster in her room. Hannibal thought Will looked ever soon handsome. It was one thing seeing Will in his own environment - flannel shirts, worn jeans and fishing jackets. But seeing Will in Hannibal’s environment was a whole new experience. A very positive experience. Five stars on Trip-advisor.

The white button up was clearly too big for Will. The sleeves coming to rest in the middle of his palms, the collar loose around his neckline, showing off his prominent collar bones. His black slacks were a little loose around the waist, but nothing that wasn’t an easy fix, though they fit almost perfectly length-wise.

Will was only half dressed and looked breathtaking. “You look nice.” Hannibal expressed a genuine smile as he not-so-subtly checked Will out, eyes raking down the formal attire on

Will's silhouette. "Even so seemingly out of your comfort zone, you still pull everything off." He nearly murmurs that sentence, barely even registering his own speech.

Will smiles as he searches with his eyes around the room. "I'll have to take you out to one of the clubs one night. Reverse the roles and get you in your first pair of jeans." He pictured the image, Hannibal in a short sleeved t-shirt and a pair of Levi's jeans. Having to bite his bottom lip to stop his smile spreading further.

Hannibal laughs, also attempting to picture himself is such casual wear. "I'll be waiting for the invitation."

"So tell me Will, what was it that made your predictably 'boring' day so strange?" Hannibal's eyes stay focused on Will's figure as he reaches for a belt off the jeans he was just wearing.

Will was hesitant for a second, stopping to think as he began to loop the belt around his waist. *Was he really about to tell Hannibal a story that ended in someone shouting a slur at him?*

Yes, yes he was.

"I went out on my lunch break to buy something to wear tonight."

Hannibal's breath stifled for a quick moment. *Those words taken out of context sounded so pretty coming from Will's mouth.*

Now for some reason that set Hannibal off.

Not even five minutes had passed from the moment Will had walked into the room, and Hannibal was already fighting off that burning feeling again. The ache in his crotch couldn't distract his mind from the conversation he was supposed to be having with Will. However, what the ache could do was cast an image into Hannibal's mind. Projecting it onto the vast stone walls of his palace.

Will was still speaking as Hannibal fought away this image, nodding occasionally in an attempt to pretend he was listening. He tried to focus his eyes on the real Will, not the fantasy in his head. Yet, that didn't work.

He had known the younger man was slim, having not enough money to eat fillingly everyday and as a possible result of childhood malnutrition. Now, in front of Hannibal was Will Graham. Will Graham in something other than a loose fitting flannel shirt. His waist was accentuated with the belt, along with the loose fit of the other two garments doing wonders for his silhouette. Hannibal wasn't even going to try and convince himself he wasn't mentally saving the image for his own private enjoyment.

"-and after that first shop it was like the god's had decided to reward me for everything good I've ever done before, -"

Hannibal bit his lip, canines sharp and pearly. He took a breath in through his nose, trying so hard to regain control of himself. He'd never felt like this before. Hannibal had always been

able to control himself - sexual desires or not. But for some reason, Will Graham was the exception of every rule he'd ever created for himself.

Hannibal suddenly noticed that Will had stopped speaking.

"Hannibal? Hannibal you okay?"

If there was a time for Hannibal's body to magically regain control, now was probably a good moment.

He smoothed the chest of his shirt down with one hand as he rolled his shoulders. Doing whatever came to mind to distract himself.

"Apologies Will, I'm fine though thank you." Hannibal offered a flash of a smile as he briskly looked up at the man in front of him.

Although it felt bad to lie to someone so special, he wasn't exactly going to say *'Apologies Will, it seemed after having you sit so promptly in my mind all day, I have become aroused at the first sentence you said. Then, as soon as you started telling me about your day, instead of listening I decided to picture you in lingerie. But please carry on with what you were saying.* Yet, he did wonder what Will's reaction would be if Hannibal did say that. Perhaps he'd ask Hannibal to leave? Perhaps he'd have a much different reaction - throwing himself onto Hannibal, telling him the feelings were mutual as they made passionate love on Will's bed. *That would be interesting.*

Hannibal quickly cleared his throat, swiping the concepts from his head. "Please, continue."

"Seriously, are you sure you're good? You look sort of pale." Concern was present in Will's voice as he spoke. Clearly quite worried about Hannibal.

Hannibal adored Will's boldness. He couldn't think of a single other person he knew who would openly tell him he looked sickly. Naturally, Will didn't mean to offend in any way with the comment, he was only showing his honest concern for Hannibal's wellbeing. It was quite sweet really. "Please Will, perhaps I ate something odd today. I really do feel fine. I would love to hear about what happened next though."

Will smiled to himself, diverting his eyes down to the rest of the clothes in the bag. His heart pace quickened slightly as Hannibal spoke those last words.

He began to dress himself in the waistcoat as he spoke.

"Well I was trying to eat my food and well, this girl I recognised from my campus came up to me." *Will realised there was no point doing up the waistcoat due to the missing buttons, so he moved onto slipping on the new shoes.* "She was with this group of a few other people - other posh kids living off their parents' money you know."

Hannibal listens to Will tell him how the girl asked him out, how she kept pushing him to say yes even after Will had made it very clear he was in no way interested. If Hannibal lost any more control of himself, he may track this woman down and drown her. He'd find pleasure

creating a perfect display for his dear Will. Perhaps mounting her body in the university - for all of her friends to see. For Will to see.

“I had enough of her. So I finally just said it.” Will stopped speaking for a moment. Stopping himself to think of the best way to word his next sentence.

The older man waited patiently for Will to carry on, he really didn’t mind being late at all if it meant hearing Will speak for a while longer.

“I just- I don’t know why I said it, but for some reason I looked this girl dead in the eye right-” Will chuckled as he recalled the moment. With the safety of Hannibal in the same room as him, the whole moment seemed quite amusing now to look back on.

“You looked her dead in the eye…” Hannibal recited in an attempt to try and get out the last part of the sentence through Will’s fit of laughter. He had to admit, seeing Will like this, *hearing Will like this* really did have Hannibal matching his expression. Surprising himself with a small laugh as Will tried to get his words out.

Will calmed himself to the best of his abilities and sat up straight. “Okay, I looked this chick dead in the eye and just said, *my type is men*.”

Thankfully for Will, both men laughed at his recollection of the story.

Through the fits of giggles Will tried to continue. “And then- and then,” He stated quickly, “She got all pissy about it! Stormed off and rolled her eyes.”

“This girl. She was annoyed that you rejected her, because you’re gay?” Hannibal smiled not only at the story as he spoke his words, but at Will’s not-so-subtle admission of his sexuality.

“Well, I don’t think she was actually trying to ask me out in the first place.” Will was now sitting on the floor facing Hannibal. His legs bent out in front of him, leaning backwards slightly on the palms of his hands. The shoes were now on, as well as an undone grey waistcoat.

Hannibal didn’t mind the fact that they were probably going to be the last ones to arrive at this party. Sitting with Will in his small bedroom reminded Hannibal of hanging out with his friends as a teenager. Though, this time he was enjoying it.

“She wasn’t?”

Will realised Hannibal was most definitely never the target of bullying. Good looks and money, the kind of kid everyone tried to impress in school. He’d never been the person people would dare their friends to ask out just for a laugh.

“It happened a few times at school, back in the states. Kids would dare each other to ask me on a date. The first couple of times I fell for it, but it soon started to get old.”

Hannibal didn’t quite understand what Will meant. He could comprehend the fact of Will being asked out a lot, there was a lot of evidence pointing that Will was an attractive person. What he couldn’t grasp was what the younger man meant by ‘as a joke’.

He frowned ever so slightly and raised one eyebrow in confusion. Will seemed to pick up on Hannibal's puzzled expression and spoke again.

"They'd give me a time and a place for the 'date', then just wouldn't show up. Some weird form of bullying or something, I never understood the point."

Hannibal couldn't fathom why someone would have any reason for doing such a thing. *Was it out of jealousy? Was Will some sort of troublemaker in his teenage years? Perhaps his classmates had discovered Will's sexuality and had different beliefs?*

"Why do you think people did it?"

Will appeared surprised by Hannibal's question, clearly not expecting it. He had a look of wonder on his face for a moment as he thought.

"There were probably a few reasons. Me and my Dad moved a lot until I was about 13, so I was always the new kid at school. I was quiet and smart, which in the south, makes you the weird one."

Will was quiet for a moment longer, he had that same look on his face as he was in thought, so Hannibal didn't interrupt. "I dyed my hair black when I was 15, became obsessed with shitty bands and skateboarding. Got a whole bunch of piercings at one point." He knew there was no point mentioning this to Hannibal, well aware the older man had already discovered this fact. "My classmates probably thought I was a bit weird, which was fair."

The air was silent for a second, in a panic of making things awkward, Will spoke again. "Well anyway," He knew right as he started to carry on the story, whatever he was about to say would *definitely* make things awkward. "Where was I…"

Hannibal watched Will, eyes never leaving the man sitting below him as he spoke. "She became angry at you after your rejection." He reminded.

Will nodded quickly, suddenly remembering. "Yeah- yeah that." He rolled his eyes in frustration, thinking back to the event. It made Hannibal even more intrigued. *What could've happened in such a short space of time to have Will so worked up?* "I took her going back to the group as my sign to leave. So I grabbed my stuff and went to leave."

Hannibal watched as Will sighed, his brows involuntarily frowning at the younger man's discomfort of just recalling the story.

"This- this guy, one of the boys in that group got up and shouted at me. Saying how she 'didn't want me either, fag'." Will spoke with his hands, creating air quotations with his fingers.

It seemed the girl wasn't the only person in the group in danger of becoming Hannibal's next favourite recipe. *Perhaps he'd pose the insolent boy along with another one of the group. Posing them as homosexual lovers, forever preserved in that way. It's all he'd be known for. Searching the boy's name, the only results would be how his murder was erotically gay. Oh how beautiful that would be.*

Hannibal wasn't sure what to do. He'd never genuinely felt the need to comfort someone. He'd always done it out of politeness and manners, not out of his own feelings.

His body seemed to move by itself, uncrossing his legs and standing up.

The rustling of Hannibal's jacket seemed to alert Will out of whatever trance he'd put himself in. His habit of zoning out at bad times making a return. He looked up at Hannibal, watching the man curiously as he sat down beside Will. Hannibal had seen others do this before. Getting down to someone's level when they're upset, Hannibal hoped such a notion would help Will. The room was silent for a moment longer.

Will was clearly upset by the incident, it made Hannibal uneasy. "Did it attract attention?" He knew the question practically answered itself.

The younger man took a deep sigh, running his hands over his face and through his hair. "I don't even know why it bothered me so much- I just, It's happened before. It's not like I'm not used to it."

"Perhaps there was something different this time, something small." Hannibal offered.

Will's head turned to face him, their eyes meeting for a few seconds before Will looked back down to the floor. It was Hannibal's turn to sigh, though he held it back in his nose. He'd seen Will through so many different emotions in just so little amount of time. He saw Will laugh, he'd seen him frustrated, he'd seen anxiety take over the man's expression. And now, a look of sadness. *Yet somehow, through all these emotions, Will remained so beautiful.* Hannibal wanted to kiss Will.

"It was you." Will spoke. His eyes were still locked in the old carpeted floor.

Hannibal was confused. "Me?"

"When I told her I was busy, I thought about our plans tonight." Will took a breath, sharply stopping halfway through. As if taking back something he was about to say. His breath faltered before sighing. Blue eyes met crimson. "So- so, when I was called *that*. It almost felt like I had dragged you down with me." He stopped for a moment. "And I don't want that,"

Hannibal's sharp canines bit the insides of his cheeks, drawing blood in his mouth, the metallic taste pulling him back to the realities of Will's bedroom.

"It doesn't matter." He whispered softly.

Turning to look at Hannibal, Will didn't pull away this time.

Their eyes stayed together as Hannibal spoke, his voice ever so gentle with the quietness of his accent. "In the short amount of time I've spent with you, I have enjoyed every moment. You're the break in my day, like a vacation from my own boring world."

Will laughed through his nose, smirking slightly at Hannibal's words. "God, no wonder I got called a fag." He closed his eyes as he laughed.

The comment caught Hannibal off guard, laughter taking himself by surprise. The blissful mood from earlier had returned, lighting the air through Will's laughter. "Now, I believe now is a good time to tell you that your waistcoat and blazer are from the Galvan women's collection."

Will looked down at himself, fingers running through the fabric of his clothes. He broke out into another fit of laughter before managing to say, "Does it atleast look good?"

Hannibal's lips curved, showing off his sharp teeth as he looked at Will. "Absolutely beautiful."

Will took Hannibal's comment as a joke, thinking that he was being complimented like a woman.

"Now," Hannibal spoke assertively, trying his best to make a straight face.

Will stopped his giggles, matching Hannibal's serious demeanour.

"Have you ever been drunk off of champagne that you didn't pay for?" Hannibal pushed himself to stand up, offering out a hand to help Will.

Will took the hand, Hannibal's skin warm and full of comfort against his cold hands. "Can't say I have." Will wondered where this conversation was going.

"Well, it's about time you experience it."

Looking at his banged up clock, Will realised that the party had officially started just over 10 minutes ago. Hannibal had also seemed to notice this fact, making his way towards the door.

Will felt almost giddy with excitement, like a child on Christmas. He wasn't excited for the party - well, Hannibal's suggestion was tempting - instead he was excited for the ride there. Pressed up against Hannibal for another 20 minutes, Will was already feeling euphoric just thinking about it. The man was like his own heater with that jacket on.

Fixing his blazer, Will opened his bedroom door, walking through and out to the front. He turned to Hannibal, forcing himself to keep eye contact. Something told him doing this was the smart option.

"I like talking to you, too. I don't know how to word it all fancy like you did, but I really like being friends with you. A lot." Will took a deep breath after he spoke, like he was getting something off his chest.

Hannibal searched for any other signs in Will's eyes, but found nothing but the truth. He smiled. "I like being friends with you too."

The two men stood in front of Will's front door, almost scared to be the first person to move. Lucky for Will, Hannibal took the lead.

“Shall we go then, I hate to leave people waiting.”

Will laughed softly, reaching to open the door. “Of course you do.”

Smiling fondly at the younger man’s sarcastic comment, Hannibal followed closely behind.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Windswept from the velvet air of England's winding roads, Will combed a quick hand through his hair as the bike came to a stop.

Hannibal had parked alongside a plethora of other luxury vehicles. The building in front of them was a classic depiction of an English manor house - the sort you'd expect to see in a British history drama. There was a cobbled road leading up to the house, along with a grand fountain. The fountain water sparkled, crystal droplets sweating off the naked statue in the middle. Well-maintained bushes lined the leading pathways around the stone walls and driveway, there were hidden lights behind the plants, producing an alluring glow for decoration.

The manor itself was its own being; statuesque, off-white brick walls lined with symmetrical windows, more chimneys than any building should ever need, the tip of every roof had a small stone spike on it. Every detail was so unneeded, yet not unwelcome.

Will was still sitting on the back of Hannibal's motorcycle, he looked the building up and down. "So this is where the rich folks come to have a good time?"

Hannibal swung his legs over, pocketing the key into his leather jacket as he stands up. "A lot of the time formal events as such are held at the host's residence, though occasionally large manors are rented out to preserve one's actual home in the events of a party - however this isn't the case here." He reaches out in a familiar manner, holding his hand out to Will. Of course, the younger man takes it without hesitation, the feeling of touch coming naturally.

Planting his feet into the damp pavement, Will rubs the palm of his free hand up and down the side of his thigh. Hannibal didn't take any initiative to separate their hands, so Will didn't either. The taller man takes the lead and begins to walk towards the towering open doors of the building.

Two men dressed in black suits stood parallel, guarding each side of the doorway. Hannibal didn't acknowledge them, as if it was the most normal thing in the world. Will was first greeted by a wide, carpeted staircase. He could hear his footsteps tap awkwardly on the marble tile flooring, although he was quickly silenced as they walked across a thin carpet. Will wondered how old the thing under his feet was. It was free of stains, but the colours were clearly faded, along with the edges thinning around intricate detailing.

There was no one other than the two doormen present. The only sign of life being a distant echo of loud music.

In any other case, Will would've assumed he had arrived at the wrong address and taken himself back home. But tonight, it will be different. He didn't want to embarrass Hannibal, he

didn't want to be known as *'Hannibal's charity piece.'* Tonight he was just Hannibal's friend. That's all Will was. Just a friend hanging out at a party.

They walked in a comfortable silence down twisting, dimly lit hallways - their hands still tightly closed together. Will wondered if Hannibal could tell if he was nervous, perhaps he just assumed so. *A lower class American guy showing up at some rich European's engagement party, now who wouldn't feel sorry for the poor man?*

Eventually, the sound of music made an appearance in the hospital-like hallways, echoing off the raised, picture-lined walls.

Will feels his breath hitch with anxiety, the deep realisation of how out of his comfort zone he'd forced himself finally setting in.

Hannibal must've noticed the shorter man's small panic, as he offers a small squeeze of encouragement with their intertwined hands. Oddly enough, it works, calming Will to the point he didn't quite want to turn around and run as fast as he could out of the maze that was this strange, old building.

The hallway leads into an open area. There's an illuminated bar towards the side of the room, the stools occupied by long haired women in varied lengths of dresses. Roaring music, filled with bass and snares bounced through Will's deafened ears. He'd never had a problem with going to loud clubs, there was a small local one he occasionally visited - they sold good whiskey for cheap.

Will is brought back to reality from a small swipe of Hannibal's thumb. The taller man's skin glides softly over Will's knuckles, he wonders if Hannibal even realised he was doing this. The brunette twisted his neck, blue eyes meeting dark crimson, water mixing with blood. From the oblivious smile on Hannibal's face, he was either pretending to not realise his actions, or genuinely didn't. Will assumed from the nearly unnoticeable, mischievous glint of the sharp canines that it was safe to assume the former.

Hand in hand, the two men walk further into the open room. Still looking ahead, Hannibal spoke quietly. "Anytime you wish to leave, please remember to tell me and we'll be right back outside."

Will, barely hiding a smile at Hannibal's worry for him, replied. "Yeah, that's if you remember the way back - you ever seen the movie Labyrinth?" His words are hushed, matching the older man's tone.

It was Hannibal's turn to hide a smirk. "No, however, I think I'm safe to assume what it's about."

"Well, if you were thinking of goblins and David Bowie kidnapping a baby, you would be correct." Will stifles a laugh at his own joke.

Hannibal begins to speak as they navigate themselves through groups of standing people and randomly placed tables with plush seats. "You'll have to show me it sometime-" His speech is quickly cut off by the sight of an approaching group.

Before Hannibal has time to even say anything to Will, the warmth of the younger man's hand slips away from his grasp. Hannibal jerks his head around to the direction Will had run off to, hearing the man mutter something about grabbing drinks before finding his own way over to the bar.

Frowning, Hannibal turns himself back to the group of people he'd have to spend the next ten minutes talking to. Everyone here was a classic case of nepotism. Sure, Hannibal was well aware that he was just as - if not more - fortunate with money than most people here. He was born into a rich family and could easily live off the remaining fortune comfortably without having to work a day in his life. Yet, he didn't. Hannibal was almost sure he and Will could very well be the only two people in the room with earned scholarships, rather than paid.

A woman with a shrill voice was first to speak. Her accent was similar to most people at these events, *posh*. She quickly hands Hannibal a flute of champagne from a passing server. Her dress is a medium grey colour, tight fitting and low cut. The below knee hem of the dress had small ruffles waving around the woman's pasty skin. If anything was apparent to Hannibal, she was severely lacking in class and had no excuse for it. Her hair was blonde, straight and unstyled - a clear lack of effort - the blue of her eyes was different to Will's. No shards of gold, nor a tinge of emerald. Just plain, simple blue. *How boring.*

"Hannibal!" She speaks with familiarity, as if they're friends. "I was starting to think you'd broken your promise to me." She pouts in faux annoyance, a painted fingernail grazing over Hannibal's leather jacket. "But I suppose you can be forgiven, especially when you've shown up in such a… *dashing outfit.*" Her eyes dart with purpose from his chest back to his face, giggling flirtatiously as their eyes met.

Hannibal smiles politely. "Apologies for my lateness," *Of course, he wasn't sorry at all. Really, he'd much rather not shown up at all.* "We got a little caught up in something." Hannibal gestures towards the bar, pointing with the direction of his shoulder. He lets his eyes linger on Will for a moment, catching the man's eye for no more than a second before being pulled back into the conversion - this time by a male's voice.

The man looks ever so similar to the girl who had just spoken, Hannibal assumes it was safe to say they're related. "Word got 'round that you were bringing a 'plus one'." He spoke using air quotations with his two fingers. "It's all anyone wants to talk about." The man rolls his eyes rudely as he finished his sentence.

It was time for the only other girl in the group to have her moment. "Please Hannibal, you just have to show her off. Tell us," Her head turns to the bar behind Hannibal. "Which one of those lucky ladies had the pleasure of making Count Lecter late?" She winks, clearly attempting to insinuate much more than what had actually happened.

Hannibal laughs. He understood people had been waiting to see him married for many years, he'd never publicly dated someone, in fact, other than the family-friends he was forced to be around in his teenage years, he'd never dated anyone. Of course, there had been hookups here and there towards the end of his secondary school years. But apart from that, there was never a need, never an urge.

These people just couldn't wait to meet Hannibal's possible bride-to-be. *Oh how they were all in for the most beautiful shock of their lives.*

"If I knew you'd all been so excited to meet him, I would've brought him along much sooner." Hannibal studies their faces, excitement and pleasure filling his own as their expressions change. Their features morphed and twisted, eyes widening and lips falling ever so slightly apart at those two fateful words.

'Him.'

Turning back to the bar, his eyes instantly meet Will's. He had been watching the group converse from a far, a look of blatant displeasure blanketing his gorgeous face. Hannibal smiles, gesturing for Will to come over with his hand. Will seemed to debate it for a moment, biting his lip subconsciously - a small tell Hannibal had picked up on - Will always did it before doing or saying something he usually wouldn't.

The brunette swings his legs over the bar stool, throwing back the remaining contents of his glass before placing it on the bar counter.

There were hushed whispers coming from behind Hannibal, however he decided now wasn't the time to focus on anything other than the deity walking towards him. Grey waistcoat undone, black tie loosely done up over an off-centre shirt collar. *Will was ethereal.*

Head hung low, the younger man focuses only on Hannibal, his eyes never leaving his form.

Hannibal hears a high pitched giggle, then a chorus of shushes. He understood. Will was a handsome man, he'd have girls falling over those cheap, grey dress shoes just to buy him a drink. *And yet, he was all for Hannibal. Hannibal's to show off. Hannibal's to buy a drink. Hannibal's to drive home.*

Hannibal extends his hand out to Will, pulling him close to his side, then proceeds to wrap a possessive arm around his waist. "Will, dearest," He begins, playing along with the group's assumptions. "It seems you have a few admirers. I've just been informed about the amount of people so excited to meet you." His gaze stays focused on the shorter man beside him, a firm hand smoothing the sides of Will's blazer gently.

Will's eyes move from the marble floor to meet Hannibal auburn gaze. His stoic expression changed ever so slightly to a much gentle one, lips curling out of a frown and eyes relaxing.

Someone clears their throat from in front of them. Snapping out of the temporary trance, Will whips his head towards the sound of the intrusion. Hannibal, however, keeps his eyes locked on Will, his grip shifting from a gentle hold to a much firmer grasp on the smaller man's waist.

The group's eyes range from being locked on the placement of Hannibal's arm, darting between the two men's faces and looking around the room to see if anyone else is watching them.

“Fancy seeing you here.” The boy who spoke was as average as they came. His face forgettable, average height and had nothing special going on with his voice. He wore a black, velvet blazer. Along with black slacks, a matching bow tie and a white dress shirt. Again, nothing special. “Lauren over here really thought you were lying about being busy tonight.”

Hannibal was surprised. *These people were familiar with Will? But Will seemed so displeased to meet them. He had quickly seen himself off as soon as they approached.* Hannibal thought about the situation for a moment, until it finally clicked.

Will spoke with uncertainty and an unnoticeable shake in his voice. “Yeah, well- sorry about that, again.”

Hannibal had his assumptions, however he’d still like to confirm them. “You’ve met?” He gave an attempt at sounding curious, although already knew the answer to his own question.

The blonde haired man spoke again. “Yes actually, in fact just this afternoon was the last time we spoke.” His tone was smug as he laughed his way through the words. “So unlike dear old Will to not tell us about a party.”

The man took a small step, a pale hand reached out to place itself on Will’s arm. Will quickly jerked his shoulder away, his own body being pulled closer to Hannibal's side as he moved. The man rolled his eyes and wiped his hand on the side of his velvet torso.

“Careful!” Another male voice came from behind the blonde boy. He laughed and rested an elbow on the blonde’s shoulder. “Don’t want to catch whatever he’s got.”

Hannibal was taken aback from the sudden comment, once again, he felt himself speak without being able to control it. “I’m sorry?” His tone was asking a question, yet his face suggested much more.

Will glances from the small group back to Hannibal. He was met with an expression he’d never seen before, at least not on Hannibal’s handsome face. His appearance was cold. No anger, no confusion, just a bleak look.

“Oh Lecter, I’m sorry but I’m pretty sure it’s already over for you. Especially with *that* proximity. Really, you’re a brave man for getting so close.” The entire group erupted into laughter, Will, however hung his head low and shifted uncomfortably against Hannibal’s touch.

This time, Hannibal felt himself smile. “I’m afraid I still don’t quite understand what you mean.” His lips were curved into a smile, yet his eyes were still so desolate.

The ignorant boy’s voice curled into Hannibal’s ear canal once again. “Don’t you understand what bringing a guy like *him* can do to a reputation like yours?” Hannibal slanted his eyebrows in confusion. The boy sighed before speaking. “He’s *gay*, Hannibal. Just another broke fag in need of someone to pay his rent.” He laughed along with his friends, as if the joke of the century had just been told.

Hannibal felt Will's muscles tense underneath his palm. It sent a jolt of cold pain through his own fingertips. The room fell quiet on Hannibal's ears, the sounds of crowds and music inaudible compared to the fill of laughter in front of him.

"I know."

The group fell quiet at Hannibal's words.

A moment passes before the blonde boy speaks up. "You knew?"

Hannibal didn't answer.

As if Hannibal hadn't heard it the first time, the boy repeated himself. "You *knew*?" Two seconds passed. "You knew he was a fag?" He practically scoffed those last words, as if it were the most unbelievable thing ever said.

That word. Hannibal heard it used improperly far too many times already. "I think I'd be more concerned if he wasn't." This time, the silence sounded ever so beautiful falling on Hannibal's ears. He smirked, glancing quickly towards Will, then back in front before speaking. "Especially after he made us so *late*."

There were small gasps and murmurs from all around. Will looked up from the spot of marble he'd decided to focus on. Small groups of people had gathered at a distance to watch, keeping themselves in listening distance. Eyes stared at him. Faces of disgust. Faces of surprise. Faces of confusion. Faces of lust.

"Hannibal." Will murmured. It was a reflex, he didn't even realise what was coming out of his mouth before he was met with the sound of his own voice.

Will turned his head to see if anyone had actually heard him, and was of course met by the older man's strong gaze. He was about to suggest something, perhaps that they should leave as soon as possible or something like that.

"Seriously? That's fucking disgusting. God. And here everyone was, so excited to meet the girl who'd won over the bachelor's heart." He scoffed, flicking his in-need-of-a-haircut, straight brunette hair to the side. "And it's just some cock sucking homo-" The smirk of a laugh had started to form before swiftly being interrupted.

Will wasn't sure how he expected this to go. He wasn't sure how he'd walk away from this - *if he'd walk away from this*. He wasn't sure where Hannibal was going with his act of them being in some sort of scandalous relationship. He wasn't sure why Hannibal was doing it. He wasn't sure what to expect at all.

What he *didn't* expect, was for someone to throw a punch for him.

Hannibal lurches forward, his expressionless face morphing into one of clear anger. His leather jacket flings swiftly around his torso, the fabric pulling off his shoulder from the sudden movement. Mere seconds had passed since the warm weight of Hannibal's hand had

left Will's body. The taller man's arm snaked gently past Will's hips as his palm folded into a fist.

With the force of what might've well have been the bike he got here on on, Hannibal punched the man square in the nose.

The rude, brunette man stumbles back, his blonde friend grabbing him by the arm as he falls. Echoing gasps had disappeared and morphed into a silence. Nobody knew what to do. Especially Will. *Will had just watched a man insult him straight to his face, then witnessed said man get absolutely decked by the guy he'd jerked off to last night.*

More people than Will had previously seen were now watching the scene. Music was still pumping through the tension-thick air, people were looking and all exits seemed to be blocked by the small crown forming around him.

The man's nose is now bleeding, he's managed to find his footing but his hands are busy swiping off the thick, crimson flowing from his nostrils. *Did Hannibal break his nose?* Will wondered for a moment. With the sudden realisation that time was in fact moving again, Will rushed forward to a strangely calm looking Hannibal.

Hannibal's fist was still clenched into a tight ball, knuckles white from the pure force he was gripping his own palm with. Will reached out, his fingers ghosting Hannibal's shoulder, retracting his touch as the last second. "Hannibal, we should leave- I'm sorry." He instantly regretted his words. *'We?'* Now he was forcing Hannibal to leave with him because he felt a little offended by one of Hannibal's friends.

In a small way, it was slightly relieving. Of course, the small amount of time he'd been friends with Hannibal had been possibly the best days of his life. Then again, every day had been lived as if it were Will's last. He was so afraid. So afraid of it just being some joke. So afraid of Hannibal turning to him and declaring his new found hatred for Will. The small, gnawing fear of losing his friend would finally leave. It wouldn't leave by itself, something, *someone* would have to go with it obviously.

The man's blood splutters into the air as he scoffs. "Seriously Hannibal? You're seriously getting into a fight over him? A fucking fistfight over a guy. You're like a fucking chick - fight like one too." The group didn't laugh this time.

A different voice spoke up, one of the boys who had yet to interfere. "Micheal, maybe you should just leave it. You need ice on that or something-"

Micheal, however, clearly had his own priorities and ignored the boy's words of advice. "C'mon Lecter. Show me how hard you really hit, or was that all you had in you? I'd be less surprised if it was your hand that broke and not my nose." He laughs. "Y'know some people would be so very honoured to be punched by great old Lecter." He clicks his tongue, wiping away another stream of red from his lips. "Now, how will the news slide with your little fanclub? How will they react after they find out the man they'd been *saving* themselves for was more interested in their brothers. Just another dirty fag-"

It was Will's turn to interrupt his vulgar words. His fist mirrored the exact position Hannibal had hit just a few minutes prior, knuckles colliding harshly with the flexible cartilage in Micheal's nose.

Another chorus of gasps made its rounds through the tall ceilings, this time joined with a feature of shouts, barely heard over the music.

Instead of falling dramatically to the ground, this time, the crude man decided to retaliate. He lurched at Will, palms digging into the fabric of Will's shoulders. It was understandable. *Will didn't expect the man to stand there and take beatings from a couple of cocksuckers of course.*

Micheal's dirtied hands pulled Will back towards him, returning the brutal grip on Will's shoulders. He brought his knee up, knocking the air out of Will while the shorter man's body was still frozen with shock. Grunting in pain, Will had to quickly recover as he doubled over. He went for the man's ankle, digging a hasty kick just above his foot. To Will's surprise, he watched as Micheal dropped down. What Will didn't except, was to be brought down to the floor with him.

The two men were now on the ground together. Will's body acted quicker than his mind, his elbow springing out to place a steady hit on the bloody man's ribs. His dominance was short lived as he was flipped from his front in a rough manner, spine digging uncomfortably into the cold floor. He soon felt an unwelcome pressure just above his hips.

Micheal was straddled over Will, his heavy body constricting Will's movement. The smaller man watched from below as a tangle of arms attempted to grab the boy off of him. It was like a predator locking onto their prey, a fox to a rabbit, a cat to a mouse. His dark eyes locked Will's in an agitated gaze. Time moved much slower than usual. Arms broke free a couple times, sometimes failing to connect with Will's face, sometimes not.

Out of all the outcomes Will could've predicted for this evening, this ending would've been very far down on the list.

Even with the rate time was moving at, Will thought it suspicious of how long he'd been pinned down for. His eyes couldn't seem to locate Hannibal from his position on the floor. For what could've been a second, Will pondered the situation. His mind jumped straight to the conclusion of the whole evening being a setup. *Hannibal has left.* He told himself. Hannibal has left Will to be beaten to death by some stranger who called him a slur a few hours ago, just for a laugh. He knew it was dangerous to trust rich people. Sure, no one was perfect. But there was no one more *imperfect* than a rich guy. It was one of the only helpful things his Father had ever told him.

Will's pity party was soon crashed by a weight being lifted from his body, in a literal sense oddly. There was a loud sound next to his ear, the sound of glass smashing on marbled floor - someone dropping their drink. Reflexes didn't do much for Will, his legs felt like concrete stuck to the floor. However, his eyes flickered over the above surroundings.

There he was. Hannibal was like some sort of unrealistic depiction of an angel. A small trail of blood trickled down the side of his lips. The crystal lights above reflected a glow from

behind Hannibal, as if he ascended straight from the heavens to assist as a guardian angel.

Hannibal had viciously kicked the man in the shoulder, shunning him away from Will's body. He looked down at Will, their eyes meeting like old friends reuniting after many years. He didn't hold a hand out for Will to help himself up with. Instead, reaching down with two arms and gently pulling the younger man up by his arm, the other hand cradling Will's lower back.

Will was brought to his feet, slightly unsteady after the direct amount of pressure had caused his legs to feel strangely numb. Hannibal no longer had that terrifying look of cold anger on his face, instead, it had been replaced by a much more concerned light of gentleness.

-Espoir-

Hannibal had pulled them both into one of the many bathrooms in the large manor house. He'd promptly locked the door behind them with his free hand, the other occupied by Will's own - they'd stayed tangled together ever since Hannibal had pulled Will up from the ground and dragged him away from the shouts and curious eyes.

They were both still heavily breathing, standing in silence as Will rapidly jerked his hand away from Hannibal's.

Will sighed. It was obvious neither of them wanted to be the first to address what had just happened. "What the fuck was that?" His tone was angry, pulling himself up onto a sink counter as he looked at Hannibal.

Hannibal's face changed from the gentle look of worry to simple confusion. He turned to Will, looking up slightly.

Will took Hannibal's puzzled silence as a cue to carry on. "If you wanted to use me to piss off a couple of your rich friends you could've just asked." Hannibal parted his lips to speak, but Will cut him off, silencing him. "But I don't want to be used as a catalyst for your late rebellious phase." He rolled his eyes, sighing deeply as his fingers ran shakily through his hair.

Walking over to the sink, Hannibal unfolded a towel from the other side of the counter. "If that's how you saw it, I deeply apologise." He ran the water, waiting for it to turn warm. "Mylimasis, I assure you, that's not how I meant for it to be." Hannibal paused, running the towel under the lukewarm water momentarily. "I, myself, do not know why I acted the way I did. But I can tell you I didn't do anything with the intention of harming or insulting you. I'm sorry."

Will shook his head, hands still pressed firmly around his face. "No, no." Hannibal looked back up to the younger man, taking in his distressed form. "You shouldn't be the one saying that. Look- I just, I'm sorry. This is my fault. See, if I just hadn't come today, you'd probably still have a decent reputation, people wouldn't think you're dating some charity case. I'm

sorry- it's just that-" Will was rambling, saying anything that came into his mind that might save himself from becoming enemies with Hannibal.

Thankfully, the feel of smooth skin pulling his hands away from his face cut him off. Will jerked back at first, flinching from the seemingly unwanted touch. Hannibal stood there, arms length away from Will. He looked so different from this angle, almost vulnerable. Will had always seen him as an intimidating figure, the image of masculinity. Tall, handsome and clearly muscular. Yet, from above, Hannibal looked so *human*.

His face had small prints of blood littering it - probably transferred somewhere off of Will. His hair was still unstyled, but was now messy and covering a small corner of his eye.

It was the first time in many years Will had felt the presence of someone else. For all his life, people and simply been people. He didn't take into account who they were, where they came from, how their family was, what they were doing here. They were just *people*. But suddenly, someone had crept into Will's life, stripping away the protective sheet and showing him the true meanings of reality.

And Will let him.

A warm, damp cloth stroked over his face, stopping occasionally to clean deeper. Hannibal focused on wiping the blood from Will's face, his eyes not meeting Will's. "You're my friend, Will. I care how you are - not what they think."

Will didn't reply. He didn't need to. For some reason he knew what they were both thinking. He knew there was so much more to say, but no reason to say it. Deep down, they both knew Hannibal wanted to give a different reason to his actions, but couldn't.

Will let out a small laugh. Hannibal looked from whatever area of Will's face he was scrubbing to his eyes. "I've never exactly been one for friendship, but I'm pretty sure punching a guy together on the third day of knowing each other isn't how it's supposed to go."

"I see no reason why friendship should have rules, especially ours." The only sound in the small bathroom were the quiet noises of the two men breathing. "Although, I must admit it does upset me."

Will's heart rate picked up again. He knew he'd upset Hannibal. Still, he asked a question he knew the answer to. "What does?" Their eyes pulled away from each other, courtesy of Will.

Hannibal stepped back slightly, examining Will's face to check he's got everything. "The fact you went through all of this, yet still didn't get to taste a drop of that fancy champagne."

A look of surprise took over Will's features, he expected something much different to be said. After the small intake of shock washes over him, he lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding in, amusement at Hannibal's words causing a small chuckle. "Damn shame if you ask me. Although, I did manage to down a quick few fingers of whiskey before you called me over."

Hannibal tilted his head in disagreement. “I do recall promising an outcome of at least one person being drunk on expensive champagne.”

“You know,” Will took the damp towel from Hannibal’s hand, turning his body to run it under the sink. “Now that you say it, it’s all coming back to me now.” He rings out the excess water of the towel and holds it out, beckoning Hannibal closer to him.

Hannibal took a step closer, tilting his face up towards Will and placing a hand on either side of Will’s thighs for stability. “Like you said, *a damn shame*.” He added in a small southern drawl to his words, imitating Will’s slipping accent. Will laughs at the sound. “The night is still young. May I invite you to enjoy a bottle of Louis Roederer Cristal with me, in the safety of my home, of course.” Hannibal was originally planning on indulging in some of his ‘nightly activities’, however he can always fit something more into his evening, he’d used to running on a tight schedule of course.

Will is focusing on gently rubbing the wet towel over Hannibal’s smooth features. “That fancy champagne?”

“Some would say so.”

“Well then, I hope you’ve got enough to get a grown man stumbling over his own feet.”

“Trust me dear Will, you’ll be pleasantly squiffy after just a few sips.”

There was that phrase again. *Dear Will.* Will knew the term ‘dear’ was used as one of endearment, a word you’d use on a child, or your significant other. Well, that’s how they used it over in the states at least. Will had to remember things were going to be different everywhere he went. Calling someone ‘dear’ could easily just be a way to speak to a friend in Lithuania, the same way Hannibal had called him ‘clumsy’. Or perhaps it had something to do with mistranslation.

Even with all these thoughts racing through the hallways of his mind, Will still smiled. He wanted Hannibal to somehow know how grateful he was. Perhaps someday he’d be able to put it into words, but today, a smile would have to do.

The scene was domestic. Will sat on the stone counter, his back bent slightly to accommodate their current height difference. Hannibal stood patiently in front of the other man, face tilted a few degrees up for easier access. His face was clean, there only being a few smudges of red in the first place. It was like restoring an ancient renaissance painting. Will took one of Hannibal’s hands from beside his hip, gently rubbing his grazed knuckles with the now cold towel.

Hannibal watched in awe, sight focused on Will’s face rather than his hands. Will was beautiful. Hannibal couldn’t quite believe their current situation. If he’d known punching someone would have this outcome, he’d have countless enemies by now.

After finishing cleaning off Hannibal’s other hand, Will places the unfolded towel messily on the counter next to him. He pushes himself off with his palms, landing intimately close to Hannibal’s body. Will feels the other man’s breath against his cheek in the short moment

before he steps away. “We should probably leave now,” He glances quickly at the shut door. “Only a matter of time before someone inevitably comes knocking.”

Although Hannibal wants to stay locked in the moment for a while longer, he abides to Will’s wishes, agreeing with the younger man as they find their way through the empty, winding hallways of the manor.

They manage to get through the majority of the building without running into anyone who seems to recognize them. Just as they’re about to walk through the large entranceway, Hannibal comes to an abrupt stop. Will watches in curiosity as the taller man reaches towards a small coffee table. There are used, empty glasses scattered over the surface of the table, although Hannibal picks up something else.

He shows the small object to Will, a rare toothy grin visible on his face. Hannibal holds out a black packet of cigarettes, showing off the box proudly. It has a gold trim running around it, along with the branding being in gold, clearly an expensive brand. The contents seemed practically full, only maybe one or two missing.

Will spoke with confused amusement as they walked out the building. “You smoke?”

“On occasions. It’d be a waste not to use such generous party favours.” Hannibal had a serious tone, but the expression on his face was a give away to his actual entertainment.

Will shook his head, a genuine laugh emitting from his throat. “How generous indeed.”

People had now gathered in small groups, polluting the front garden with people. Clearly the news of Count Lecter throwing a punch at the party hadn’t quite gotten around to this area yet, as no heads turned at them. Hannibal walked up to a group of men, politely greeting them before asking for a lighter, mimicking an action with his hands.

Will’s cheeks hurt from the continuous smile plastered on his face. He felt younger than he ever had. More like a teenager than he did in his teenage years. Sure, he wasn’t old in any way - he was only 20 of course. Yet, sometimes bus rides home felt like he was returning from a dead-end office job to a wife that didn’t love him and two kids he barely spoke to.

Eventually, Hannibal returned to Will with a lit cigarette in one hand. He offered it to Will, holding his arm out as they walked to where Hannibal had originally parked. “Thanks.” Will quickly said before taking the cigarette between two fingers and inhaling the warm taste. They continued to swap the small stick of tobacco between each other until it eventually burnt out. “I don’t even want to know how much they cost,” Will rolled his eyes. “I’d get through a pack a day if all smokes were like that.”

Hannibal fished through his pocket for some keys, smirking at the other man’s words. “Well, fortunately for you, we have an entire evening ahead of us.”

Will nearly felt himself blush from the words, he couldn’t spend an entire evening at Hannibal’s if he was going to react this way to every little thing the older man said.

Both men boarded the bike, Hannibal helping Will as of tradition.

Will looked back on the building, his hands wrapped firmly around Hannibal's leather clad waist. It had been a strange 20 minutes. Time had moved so slowly, but every clock they had passed told him less than an hour had passed.

In that small time frame, he'd watched Hannibal punch a man square in the face purely because he insulted Will. He'd had someone fight for him. It felt so wrong to find pleasure in the idea, then again, jerking it to the thought of your only friend did seem a bit immoral. Really, Will was already in too deep, why waste strength to climb out now?

-Espoir-

It was dark outside, late into the evening but not quite the night. Perhaps nearly midnight? If Will thought his sense of time was fucked before, he was sure of it now.

Hannibal had opened a bottle of some sort of expensive looking champagne, even though they'd seem to have drunk similar amounts, Will was substantially much more hammered than Hannibal. His words were beginning to slur and his movements became slow.

They were sitting in what Will assumed to be Hannibal's living room. There was no TV, just three velvet couches surrounding a fireplace. It was beautifully decorated, the aesthetic matching the rest of Hannibal's place - accents of dark blues and deep browns, along with the general gothic aspect of everything.

Courtesy the two men, the pack of fancy cigarettes were down to five. Hannibal sat on one of the velvet pieces of furniture, his legs crossed and one arm splayed over the back of the couch, his other hand busy with yet another cigarette.

Will sat on the same sofa as Hannibal, his back pressed against the arm and his knees tucked loosely to avoid protruding into Hannibal's space. Their shoes were long disposed of, probably kicked off somewhere on the floor.

A pleasant buzz had taken over Will's body, causing an itch for something to surge itself through him. He felt tired, an outcome of a busy day and many glasses of alcohol.
He could feel Hannibal's eyes on him, but it wasn't a bother. Instead, it felt mutual.

Will also felt his flickering vision glaze over Hannibal's form. Taking in the view. Hannibal had lost the jacket and tie, leaving him in an unbuttoned waistcoat and his white shirt. The shirt also seemed to have been unbuttoned along the way, but instead, only the first two buttons had been opened, the rest unfortunately neglected. Hannibal's dark hair was still dishevelled, he hadn't bothered to fix it since their encounter at the party. He looked so very nice, like a Bond villain, blowing smoke into the pleasantly warm air.

"You have a fanclub of virgins?"

Hannibal is severely taken aback by the sudden statement. "I'm sorry?"

“The guy- the guy from the party some s’mthing about your fanclub having girls who were, like, *savin’* themselves for you or s’mthing?” His southern accent seems to come through prominently when alcohol was running through his blood.

“So I’ve heard. I humbly say that I’m quite popular in my classes.”

Will scoffs at Hannibal’s words. “Yeah, b’cuz you’re the king of humbleness.” He sighs. “It’s just weird, *saving yourself* for someone. I mean, I ain’t ever banged anyone but that’s not out of choice.”

Hannibal wondered if Will had any clue what he’s just admitted to. Will had never been tainted, so pure and perfect for Hannibal and Hannibal only. He was never a man to believe in purity of abstinence, however he now understood the appeal.

“I choose not to think too much on the subject.” Hannibal manages to say as his head spins with a million different thoughts and situations.

The alcohol had given Will a sudden surge of confidence, even in his tired state. “Y’know,” He began, his southern accent more present than it had ever been around Hannibal. “I fuckin’ hate rich kids.” Hannibal stared intently at Will, taking in every word as his eyes raked over the younger man’s relaxed form. “But- like, I dunno. You’re okay.”

“Am I one of the good ones?” Hannibal’s accent had also become more prominent in his speech, his voice heavy and with a small growl to it.

Will felt his face heat up, along with a small stir in his crotch. “Yeah.” He smiled drunkenly. “Yeah, you’re one of the good ones.” Closing his eyes, trying to take his mind off of the sound of Hannibal’s deep voice in the silent room. “You’re good. I like you.”

Hannibal’s heart jumped, he knew very well that Will meant nothing more but a platonic compliment, but it felt like so much more. He wished it was so much more. “I’m glad to hear.”

Will’s eyes were still shut tight. “You saw the stuff in my room- the stuff about that serial killer.”

He wasn’t asking Hannibal.

“I did.”

“Well? What did you think, Doctor?”

“I think,” Hannibal found himself pausing momentarily. “I think you’re like me. You’re able to find beauty where others see nothing more than ugliness.”

“Is that why you like me?” Will’s soft laugh filled the room pleasantly. “You found beauty in my ugliness.”

Hannibal breathed out a small puff of air through his nose in amusement. “No, with you I found something even rarer. I found beauty. Straight, simple, beauty.”

“Simple?”

“Well, as simple as *you* can get.”

A relaxed smile blanketed Will’s blushing face. It was so much more than ‘simple beauty’, however, there seemed to be no words in the English language that could describe how Hannibal truly felt about Will.

Will yawned, fatigue finally catching up to his mind. “You’re a dirty old man.”

The comment caught Hannibal by surprise. “I am? What makes you say so?” He wanted to tease this version of Will for just a moment longer.

“Telling me all this stuff,” Another yawn. “And not doing anything about it…” His voice trailed off as his body became more lax.

The older man watched as Will’s breath began to slow, his eyes becoming still behind his eyelids. Hannibal waited for a few more minutes, finishing his current cigarette, before coming to the conclusion that Will had fallen asleep. He took in the moment for a while longer, his eyes never leaving the sleeping man as he watched.

Eventually, Hannibal stood up, he put out the finished cigarette into an ashtray on the coffee table in front of him. His eyes still focused on Will, he walked over to him. Crouching beside the couch, Hannibal’s face moved intimately close to Will’s. His pulse was slow and steady, same with his breath. Closing his eyes, Hannibal leaned over and placed a gentle kiss to the side of Will’s face, just next to his eyebrow. He caressed the younger man’s delicate face, fingertips inspecting his smooth skin.

“Goodnight, mylimasis.” His voice was dark and rich, like a smoothly poured coffee.

There were two minuscule marks around Will’s left eyebrow. It was safe to assume these came from another one of his old piercings. Hannibal wondered how many piercings Will had once had, *how many he couldn’t see.* The temptation to check lingered in the smoky air. Instead, Hannibal pulled himself away from the enticing body infront of him and stood up.

He walked over to the wall of curtains and reached behind them, opening a window to air the room out.

Will wouldn’t wake from the breeze, well, it wasn’t likely. Hannibal had slipped some mild sedatives into the first drink he’d poured Will. Just a small dose to ensure a good night's sleep, of course.

Taking one last glance at the sleeping figure in his living room, Hannibal picked up his shoes off the floor and walked out.

-Espoir-

Small lines of sunlight painted the otherwise dark room that Will woke up in. His eyes flickered open as he took in his surroundings, taking a minute to realise where he was.

The fire was still burning, creating a pleasantly warm glow from the other side of the room. Hannibal was seated next to him, slouching in his sleep with a half burnt cigarette placed precariously in the corner of his mouth. Will pondered how he'd even gotten in that situation but soon decided it wasn't worth dwelling on too much.

The room still had a faint smell of cigarettes from their late night activities.

Will could remember the majority of yesterday evening - the whole fiasco at the party, coming back to Hannibal's place, getting pleasantly drunk with Hannibal, it was there that things started to become blurred. There's a vivid memory of what happened just as he fell asleep, small snippets of their final conversation.

Will smiled to himself as his eyes took in the sight before him. His legs rested over Hannibal's thighs, stretched out in front of him. Luckily, Hannibal didn't seem to mind.

An uncomfortable ache stretched over Will's head, pulsing through his scalp. He didn't mind though, it was just a small price to pay for yesterday. If you cut out the part where Will thought he was genuinely about to die to some guy with a bad haircut and way too thin eyebrows, it turned out to be quite successful.

Will gently removed his legs from Hannibal, swinging them off to the side with his body, sitting up against the back of the plush couch. Cradling his head in his hands, Will turned his neck to take in Hannibal's sleeping form again. *How was it fair that this man still looked so good in his sleep?*

He pushed the jealousy aside and stood up, looking around the room trying to decide his next move. Will didn't want to leave, just not yet. But at the same time, annoying Hannibal with his presence was really the last thing he wanted to happen. Although, someone told Will that Hannibal wouldn't mind. Last night, as they fell into a vulnerable state together, a strong sense of trust solidified in the smoky air.

Deciding that Hannibal really wouldn't mind if he stayed a while longer, Will took his eyes off of one of his shoes and glanced over to the small ceramic container of stationary on the coffee table. He quickly rummaged through the selection, picking out a black felt-tip marker.

The container told Will a small detail - Hannibal was an artist, or at least, had a hobby in art. There were metal rulers and compasses, along with pencils, carved into a sharp point with a blade. A thin scalpel stood upside down in the middle of the stationary, hiding between a few ball-point pens.

Will wondered what Hannibal's drawings were like. *Portraits? Diagrams? Scenery? Architecture?* He'd have to ask him about it some day.

After picking up the pen, Will's eyes wander over to something he'd been eyeing all last night. It was a square, metallic polaroid camera. The kind Will remembered one his Father's friends had when he was young.

Pen in hand, Will sauntered over to the shelf that held the camera, picking it up in his other hand. It was weighty and cold against his warm palm. He then makes his way quietly back over to Hannibal, beginning his work.

After just a few seconds, Hannibal sat in front of him - eyes closed, hair tousled over his forehead and a drawn on, curly moustache.

Will has to hold back a laugh as he takes in Hannibal's new look. He leans in close to Hannibal, their faces nearly touching as Will positions himself to fit in the photo. He leans his arm out, extending it to make sure the angle is just right. The flash snaps, surprisingly not waking the sleeping man. Will watches as the photo feeds out of the camera, grabbing it and shaking it. He places the camera and pen back down

He turns back to Hannibal, plucking the cigarette from his mouth and placing it into the overly-used ashtray.

Will sits back onto the velvet cushion, returning back to his position of folded legs and back pressed against the arm of the couch. He admires the photo as it begins to process, laughing quietly to himself about it.

Hannibal is woken by the sound of soft laughter. He looks to his left to discover the source of the delightful noise. Will is awake and holding a small piece of what appears to be paper in his hand. His alluring features are amplified by a beautiful smile as he stares fondly down at the paper.

"What have you got there?"

Will seems startled by the sudden voice. Hannibal sounds similar to how he did last night, accent much more apparent and deepened.

"Just some photo."

"May I see?"

"I'm not sure you'd like it." Will has a sense of amusement in his voice, forcing Hannibal to become even more curious.

"Oh? And why do you say that?"

"Well, if I told you I might as well show you."

"Then I guess you'll just have to show me."

Will looks thoughtful for a moment before his smile returns. "You've got me there, Doctor."

Hannibal waits a moment, their eyes locking in silence. "Well?"

Will shuffles close to Hannibal, curling his legs to the side, away from the other man. He hands the picture excitedly to Hannibal, giggling uncontrollably in his ear.

Hannibal drags his eyes away from Will to look at what he's been given. It was a photo of both of them, taken whilst Hannibal slept. There's half a cigarette hanging out his mouth and what looks like a moustache drawn above his lip. Hannibal reaches up to his own face, rubbing his finger over his skin and smudging the ink. It comes off onto his fingertip, showing that the fake moustache was in fact, still on his face.

Will is also in the photo, their faces just atoms away from touching. He looks divine of course, hair messy and eyes tinted red from the bright flash, like a succubus.

Hannibal lets out a small chuckle at the photo, sharp canines pressing lightly into his lower lip as his mouth curls up.

"What do you think?"

Hannibal's eyes stay fixed on the small, square image as he reluctantly hands it back to Will.

"It's beautiful."

Will lets out a laugh, taking the photo back into his own care and staring down at it.

"Exactly, the look really suits you. Maybe you should get a real one."

Hannibal wasn't talking about himself.

"Maybe."

Focused on the younger man's shaggy look, Hannibal is no longer looking at the picture. Why should he, when the real thing is right in front of him?

The moment stayed frozen like that for a small while longer. Will staring fondly at the now fully developed photo, and Hannibal staring fondly at Will. Eventually, he knew he'd have to break the stillness somehow. There was fresh meat in the freezer - *courtesy of a familiar glass maker.*

"In the mood for breakfast, Will?" Hannibal asked, lifting himself to his feet.

"It's okay really, you don't need to do all of that- I should probably get going soon anyway."

"No. You're not leaving until you've at least eaten something. Please, I insist." Hannibal enforces a sudden tone of forcefulness, hoping it'd convince Will to stay.

It seemed to relax Will, thankfully. "Well, only if you insist. I have been missing your cooking ever since you made that lunch."

It sets a deep pleasure inside of Hannibal when Will compliments his cooking. He leans over to the coffee table, grabbing the camera to place it back in its original place. "Let's see what I can *whip up* then shall we." Hannibal hears another gentle chuckle from behind him. He turns to look at Will, and as usual, is presented with a beautiful sight.

Will is stretching, one arm reaching out above his head, the other placed firmly on the plush cushions under him. The top couple of buttons of his shirt have come undone over time, showing off the smooth skin under Will's collarbones. His eyes are shut tightly, lips partly open in the middle of a small yawn. Hannibal begins to take a mental note of the image as a drawing reference for later, until he realises he has a much more practical solution on the palm of his hand.

A flash of light blinks over Will's body, lighting up like a flash of lighting in the confinements of the room.

Will's eyes jolt open in the sudden startlement, his arm coming down to rest on his thigh.

"What was that?"

Hannibal smirks down at the camera in his hands, picking the slowly developing picture from the small opening.

"Just some photo." He mimics Will's accent as he speaks.

Will rolls his eyes in amusement and reaches out to grab the photo, but only managing to brush against the skin of Hannibal's hand as he swiftly pulls away.

"You can keep it- just let me see it at least."

At that assurance, Hannibal hands Will his own photo, watching the younger's face for a reaction.

"Is that really how I'm walking around? God, no wonder people look at me as though their dead relative just walked past them in the hallway." He hands Hannibal the photo back, a disgusted look washing over his features.

Hannibal frowns at Will's reaction. He understood that Will didn't think very highly of himself, but to hear such degradation directly from him was saddening. He reaches into his crumpled slack's pocket and thankfully pulls out his wallet. Will watches the taller man in silence as he opens the stacked wallet and slips the small photo into one side.

Hannibal notices his puzzled gaze and meets it. "Wouldn't want it to become crumpled before I can find a frame."

"Yeah, good luck finding a frame *that size.*" He seems amused at his own comment.

"I have a good eye."

"Sure you do."

Crimson flushes with blue, blood mixing with water again as their eyes stay matched together - magnetised to one another.

Hannibal wishes every morning could be spent like this. Woken up to the sight and sound of pure beauty, along with the promise of more to come.

And, surprisingly, his wishes were granted.

Will staying the night with Hannibal comes more common than ever expected. Spending Friday nights together becomes more of a tradition over the next two years. Hannibal would visit Will at his workplace nearly everyday of the week, occasionally spending the day together, then driving him home after a shift.

Friday was always reserved for Will, any event Hannibal was invited to on that day - he'd first ask Will if he'd like to come, if not, Hannibal would cancel and spend the evening with the younger man instead. They had once gone to the club Will had suggested, however that evening was short lived as they both decided the loud music was too obnoxious after just twenty minutes.

It was beautiful, their friendship. A bulb that flickered on for the first time in 26 years in a dark room. Will brought a light into Hannibal's life that he never knew he needed.

Everything became so much brighter, so much clearer with his new found glimmer of radiance.

What was once so plain, was now in bold.

Chapter End Notes

The next chapter should hopefully be the last one set in this time frame, so get ready for that!!!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As per usual, Will had classes for the majority of the day. On days like these, Hannibal would sit in with him, lingering beside, silently giving Will comfort in the vast air of the lecture hall.

Hannibal was free from 11AM on Wednesdays, so it had become a routine for him to spend the second half of the day with his favourite person.

They'd meet each other outside Will's half-eleven class, spend the majority of the hour passing notes back and forth, they'd then head off to the emptiest place possible - whether that range from a vacant hall or the library - and eat wherever fine dish Hannibal had painted the evening before.

It had gone midday, and Will's current lecture was now over halfway finished. The two men were passing notes on a ripped piece of paper from Will's beat up notebook, not wanting to disturb a nearly silent hall with their talking.

Will's handwriting was legible, nothing fancy. The kind you'd expect an advanced schoolboy to have.

"Any big plans for tomorrow?"

Hannibal looks down at the note, reading it hastily before moving to reply. He took Will's ballpoint pen from the desk.

"No. Why? Should I?

Will glances at Hannibal's face to check the man's expression, searching for any traces of sarcasm in the man's face. Of course, he's met with a sly smirk.

Will sighs, bringing his eyes back down to the paper as he begins to write a response.

"Because it's your birthday. Obviously."

Hannibal ponders for a moment, picking up the communal pen and bringing it to his mouth in thought.

It had been difficult to break down the concrete walls, but Will had discovered this small tell over their friendship. Hannibal had a sort of oral fixation when it came to his own nervousness. As rare as it was, Hannibal would occasionally do something with his mouth whenever he felt conflicted. Whether this was grinding his back teeth, biting his lip or chewing on the inside of his cheeks, Will could easily tell.

It was helpful to have learnt. Hannibal, of course, kept a stern, unreadable expression whenever possible.

After thinking for a small moment, Hannibal put pen to paper.

"Well, if you're also free, I'd like to spend the evening with you."

Will smiles when he reads Hannibal's response. To think that asking Will to hang out is what had him biting the pen, he had to hold back a laugh.

"I'd like that. My place at 7? Will writes back.

"What do you have in mind?"

Hannibal watches intently as Will hesitates to respond. He seems to think about something before moving to answer.

"It's a surprise."

Hannibal smirks to himself as he reads the inked words. His dear was just so full of surprises, and oh, how he loved it.

"I sit with great anticipation, Will. You know me too well."

Will nearly rolls his eyes at Hannibal's odd way of conversation.

The rest of the hour is spent by Will attempting to focus on the actual lesson being taught, struggling to take notes on the bullshit being said. Meanwhile, Hannibal is much more relaxed, sitting happily in his chair, occasionally glancing at Will's face for inspiration to decorate his mind palace.

Eventually, the bell rings, signifying Will's hour-long break to eat.

Will pulls his bag over his shoulder, the one working strap tied together with an excessive amount of duct tape.

"Any of that go into your head?"

Hannibal brought his attention to Will.

"Hm?"

They begin to make their way to the exit.

"What the professor was saying," Will holds open the door, waiting for Hannibal to walk through before following. "-was any of it actually sticking in your head, or am I the problem?"

Hannibal looks thoughtfully to the ground for a moment as they walk side by side down the dimly lit hallway. "An educator like that needs their licence revoked."

Will laughed at Hannibal's abrupt bluntness. It was one of the many charming qualities of him. His opinions were either spoken in complicated riddles, weaved into metaphors. Or they

were direct and plainspoken. Will liked this. He could never understand people who spoke in a mix of the two.

At one point, taking a left, the two men find themselves walking into the vast library.

It was three stories, taking up a large amount of the main campus. The third floor offered private study rooms, which were perfect for eating whilst pretending to study with a textbook open next to you. Usually, the rooms had to be booked. However, a lot of people either didn't care for them or had no knowledge of their existence. So finding an empty one was never difficult.

The library is much busier than normal around this time, since most students take their break inside due to the usual winter rain.

Hannibal and Will walk in silence through the first two floors, staying at each other's side the whole time.

Will felt the stares of other students covering the two of them. Ever since that fateful evening two years ago, people had assumed their relationship to be romantic. It had died down a lot since the initial incident, but quick glances and assuming stares were still common.

Will felt bad for Hannibal. Once, those stares and glances had been full of adoration and want. Hannibal had thrown all of that away just for their friendship. Still, this only made Will appreciate Hannibal even more. He trusted the older man more than he'd ever trusted anyone in his life. Hannibal was always there for him, always understood him. *He'd never leave him.*

The door to the study room slides shut, clicking as it meets with the wall.

It's a windowless room, with bare, wooden walls and a round table in the centre. Four chairs stood around the table - plastic, cheap and uncomfortable.

They sit opposite each other, pulling out a chair in silence.

Will watches as Hannibal sets his bag down on the floor beside him, then reaches into it. He pulls out two ceramic bowls along with cutlery and a steel container.

It's become a common theme, so Will no longer bats an eye at Hannibal's extravagant way of performing the most simple tasks.

"I'm looking forward to seeing what's in store for tomorrow." Hannibal begins to serve the food he's brought along - a protein scramble consisting of eggs, bacon, what Will assumes is sausage, and some sort of green stuff. Whatever it is, he's sure it'll taste good.

Will thanks Hannibal as he's passed a bowel, digging in his fork to the food. "It's really not that exciting, don't get your hopes up too much."

Hannibal moves the steel container to the side of the table, leaving it out of the way of their conversation. "I'm most likely to enjoy anything you come up with, Will. Especially if it includes you, my dear."

Will pushes his chair back, lifting his legs to rest his heels on the edge of the table as he cradles the small bowel in his hand. “You really do flatter me.”

“I do what I enjoy most.”

Will’s still learning to control himself over Hannibal’s sudden comments of random flirtation. Still, he hangs his head in fear of it turning a vibrant new shade.

“I have another forensics lecture next, which of course includes yet another hour of unnecessary yapping from an incompetent teacher.”

“I couldn’t have said it better myself.”

Their mutual hate for Will’s teacher had unintentionally become a common topic of conversation. *There was a lot to complain about.*

Hannibal has that look of thought in his eyes again, like he’s about to suggest something again.

“Perhaps we could pass the time with our usual silent games? I’ve never known it to be so entertaining to hang a man with another person.”

Will laughs at his unnecessary wording. “Hangman, Hannibal. Just say you want to play hangman.”

“What did I just say then?”

Will rolls his eyes, sighing. “You just- nevermind.” He raises a hand in surrender. “We can play hangman, whatever you want. It’ll be something to keep me sane.”

Silence creeps over the air, threatening the room with rare awkwardness.

Will frowns to himself, trying to place his thoughts into a sentence. “Are you ever bothered by- like, people?”

“Am I bothered by people? In what sense?” Hannibal is intrigued by Will’s sudden outburst of curiosity.

Will sighs, averting his eyes to stare blankly at the white ceiling. “You have to have noticed the looks people give us- but you never seem bothered. I just don’t understand how.”

Hannibal pauses before answering, perhaps to consider his response. “I understand that the looks strangers give are because of us, not because of who we are individually.” Will’s confused frown deepens to one of sadness at the thought. “However, the attention of these people is simply a reminder of who I’m with. I could easily avoid the disapproving gazes, but that would mean an eternity without you, and that is something I never wish for.” Hannibal’s sharp tooth becomes visible through the tight suction of his lips, biting down, whitening the surrounding area of flesh.
The sudden turn in Hannibal’s answer catches Will off guard. He looks to the older man’s eyes, searching for any points of deception, but of course, catches nothing.

“How charming you are, Doctor.” Will shakes his head in amusement, their eyes still latched together.

“I use my skills only for good.” Hannibal sports a wicked grin, practically smirking at himself.

“I don’t believe that for a second.”

“Whatever you say, you’re the expert, Detective.”

“Are you questioning me?”

Hannibal clicked his tongue, the smug smile on his face still comfortably present. “I would never dream of it, Officer.”

“It’s Officer now?”

“I remember you mentioning something about working in the force one day.”

“Hm. Maybe, I think I’d really rock the uniform.”

“Will Graham in navy blue? I’d commit a murder just to see the day.”

“Wouldn’t put it past you.”

The day continues into their normal Wednesday routine. Spending silent hours communicating on paper, then using Will’s freetime to jump between the library and walking around the empty campus hallways.

*

Will’s day ends just how it always does, with Hannibal dropping him back home like a true gentleman. When this routine had started, Will had felt bad that Hannibal was taking time out of his day just for him. Although, it soon became clear Hannibal was doing it simply for enjoyment. Will assumed Hannibal was some sort of people pleaser, getting a kick out of giving favours for nothing but appreciation in return.

As per usual, Hannibal walks Will through the building and right to the door of his apartment. Will always considers inviting Hannibal inside, perhaps just to show him some recent research or to stay the night. However, his mind always comes up with an excuse, telling him he was pushing it, or that Hannibal was busy enough and didn’t need Will pulling him down.

Staying at each other's homes had become a common occurrence over the past year. More often they’d sleep at Hannibal’s. Will practically had his own room in Hannibal’s penthouse,

along with clothes, a pair of shoes and his own toothbrush.

It was the same with Will's small apartment. Hannibal kept some spare clothes hanging in Will's empty closet, along with a set of silk pyjamas.

After arriving at Will's door, Hannibal always made sure to wait until he heard the lock click into place before descending back down to his car. From there, he'd watch a silhouette move frantically around in the lit window.

-Espoir-

Just five minutes left. Will checks his watch, staring down at the clock hands much longer than needed. It was nothing flashy, a brown leather strap with gold accents around the hands and numbers. It had been a christmas gift from Hannibal, given to him just a month after their initial meeting. Hannibal had mentioned something about Will constantly asking him for the time, and that it was more for Hannibal's convenience than Will's. He'd told Will it wasn't expensive and to not worry, however, trusting Hannibal to label what wasn't and was 'expensive' was never very reliable.

Hannibal hadn't sat in for Will's classes today. He was busy for the majority of Thursdays, usually only visiting Will for his shift.

Thankfully, this played into Will's fortune. It gave Will time to overthink every small detail of the future of today. He'd gotten Hannibal a present last week, having to lie and tell the man he'd picked up an extra shift during the day. Hannibal was hesitant to believe it at first, but eventually either bought into it, or just decided not to worry about it.

Hannibal's present was currently stashed under Will's bed in a pair of old hiking boots. (He'd have to just hope the scent didn't rub off too hard).

He'd been saving his earnings for a few months now, skipping out on unnecessary purchases and eating only instant noodles and the stale pastries from his work.

Will didn't want to disappoint Hannibal in any way, because even if he did, Hannibal would never show it, which somehow hurt more. It was one of Hannibal's traits that Will mildly disliked. Pity. Hannibal had never explicitly said he felt sorry for Will, but he'd unintentionally shown it many ways. (For example, telling Will not to worry when the gifts they exchanged on Christmas had an unconventionally large price difference).

Thankfully, this time, Will's gift was possibly in Hannibal's price range. Retailing at £200, Will had bought Hannibal a pair of cufflinks from some posh-people place in London. They were silver, and stag shaped. Really, Will couldn't understand why they were priced so high - give him the right tools and a few days and he'd come out with the same result.

Still, he'd seen the cufflinks in a window display whilst on a daytrip with Hannibal, and thought of them ever since. Will saw their resemblance to Hannibal's strange, gothic-like decor and assumed they'd be within his tastes.

They had just under six months left together. Will understood that Hannibal would either become too busy after graduating, or move away from London. But that small, buried away voice still convinced part of his mind that Hannibal would still somehow make time for him.

Locking this feeling of dread away, Will began to consider how to give Hannibal his present. Last year, he'd gotten him a photobook with every polaroid they'd taken together. (It had become a common theme to sneak a photo every time one of them fell asleep in the other's presence).

But this year felt more significant. Will had spent a large sum of money for this gift, so it felt right to have an equally fancy presentation.

He knew there wasn't nearly enough money to take Hannibal out for drinks somewhere - especially putting into consideration the other man's taste in boujee alcohol.

This meant that going out to someplace nice was out of the question. Will knew there was always his original plan, the one he'd had in mind yesterday. It had taken him days to plan out, but still looked cheap and lazy.

Sure, Hannibal wasn't cheap or lazy, (in fact, he was quite the opposite of both), but it wasn't like he'd ever minded Will's way of life. He'd fallen asleep with Will on his old sofa countless times, *he'd even eaten part of Will's bowl of instant ramen once.*

Hannibal lived in luxury now, but he'd mentioned a childhood similar to Will's. One of starvation and exhaustion. Will had been told the story of Hannibal's sister, how they were forced onto the streets after their parents' deaths, how Hannibal had lived through the death of his young sister. The details Will was told were vague, although he'd never want Hannibal to feel pushed into talking about sour memories.

Will had never felt pressured or judged by Hannibal, only pleasant memories existed of the older man. And with that realisation, came the conclusion that Hannibal wouldn't care what he did. They've both grown much more comfortable around each other and their friendship has always been one free of judgement. With Will never commenting on Hannibal's strange metaphorical way of speaking, and Hannibal never mentioning Will's lack of general class.

Hannibal would say and do a lot of things just out of politeness, however, the comment he made yesterday stuck in Will's head:

"I'm most likely to enjoy anything you come up with, Will. Especially if it includes you, my dear."

Hannibal spoke to Will in a way that wasn't different to others. He used terms of endearment, referring to Will as 'my dear' and giving him foreign nicknames. Will would like to say he had a much more personal relationship with Hannibal than others, and that made him feel

special. All those stuck up, rich bastards clawing to be involved in Hannibal's conversation, and there Will stood. Always by his side.

Will was snapped out of his dreamland by a sudden force of touch on his shoulder. Quickly spinning in his seat to find the cause of the unwelcome gesture, he is met with a familiar face.

"D'you have something to ask? Need 'elp with something?" He had a cockney accent.

Will was confused as to why his professor had personally come up to him. Did he really look that out of it? Sure, a night's sleep has become much shorter lately, but the dark circles are surprisingly not that obvious.

"No. I'm fine." Will kept his answer short and informative. He wasn't friendly with his teacher, so there was no need to act like it.

"Well then kid, better be off."

It infuriated Will when people referred to him as 'kid'. He'd appeared much younger than his actual age for the majority of his life. (Being below average height and weight had never brought anything good to him, apart from being the one sent into the more difficult to reach places when working on boats by the docks).

Ignoring the thoughtless nickname, Will focused on the main part of the comment. Looking around the room, he realised they were the only two people left.

"Sorry, must've lost myself for a moment." Will began to pack his belongings into his bag.

"That 'as to 've been the first I've 'eard you speak, 'ad no idea you were American."

Will hummed, not sure how to respond.

"Your boyfriend, he not 'ere today?" There was no judgement in his tone, just genuine curiosity.

"He's busy." Will found no point bothering to correct him on their relationship title.

"I 'fink it's sweet, y'know. 'Aven't seen anything like it before."

Will was desperate to just leave, god knows how fast he'd have to run to make his usual bus.

"I'm leaving to see him now. It's his birthday." Will prayed his reasoning would urge the professor to wrap up whatever he had to say.

They both began to walk to the front of the room, towards the door.
"Well you better be off then, ey?"

Will nearly began to smile. So far, no one had shown this much positivity to his strange relationship with Hannibal. It felt satisfying to have some support.

Will reached for the door handle, suddenly stopping his feet to look behind him towards his professor. “Yeah, thanks.” Thankfully, he was met with a warm smile, along with a firm hand on his shoulder. Unwelcome or not, it wasn’t unpleasant.

“Go get him, son.” He raised his eyebrows deviously, winking at Will.

Will nodded, not bothering to give an audible response before pulling open the door and walking out.

Promptly walking down the hallway, a sharp pain jostled through Will’s head, causing him to flinch from the unexpected stab.

It wasn’t unusual for him to get these short migraines, although they had become less common after the past couple of years. But as of recently, they’d appeared more often. Perhaps from the stress of exams?

Seeing Hannibal always seemed to take his mind off the pain, some would say he was Will’s anchor, the one keeping him grounded. It sounded like something Hannibal would say, then he’d go on to talk about some sort of old Greek myth. Will didn’t mind though, even if most of what Hannibal said didn’t quite make it through to his head, he’d still happily listen for hours.

With that thought, Will remembers his tight schedule and swiftly takes out a small container from his bag and dry swallows two pills, continuing to walk as he does.

-Espoir-

Not having Hannibal drop him home had set Will back about twenty minutes. He still had just over 45 minutes until Hannibal was due to arrive. Thankfully everything that needed to be done hadn’t surprised him with any difficult-to-handle setbacks.

Will planned to use his spare time to freshen himself up, even with the reassured confidence that Hannibal would never be embarrassed to be seen around him, Will still couldn’t help feeling a little insecure whenever they went out in public together. Afraid they looked more like father and son, than two friends. Their age difference and different ways of dressing never helped either.

He takes a surprisingly warm shower. The water had been a lot more bearable than usual recently, as his roommate hadn’t been seen in the apartment for a while. Either he’s staying with a partner or friend, or he’s been brutally murdered and left to die in some alleyway somewhere. (Both options were equally as likely).

After his shower, (which took much longer than usual due to the warm water causing him to occasionally space out mid-washing-himself.), Will took to the bathroom mirror, towel

wrapped around his waist as he wiped the fogged condensation off.

Will took out the old, practically rusting, electric shaver from under the sink and plugged it in.

The vibration hummed gently across his skin as his excess facial hair fell into the sink. He remembered how Hannibal always compliments him on the occasion he decides to go clean shaven, so hopefully it'd be a special surprise for him. (Also Will liked it when Hannibal complimented him, but he'd never admit that. Not even to himself).

Shuffling himself into his room, Will got dressed - wearing his signature dirty, blue jeans, a dark green Sex Pistols band shirt and the same pair of trusty timberlands.

He clicked his belt into place and sprayed his favourite aftershave over himself, biting the side of his tongue gently at the sharp sting of freshly shaven skin mixing with the scented chemicals. Will enjoyed the smell. It reminded him of the better memories of childhood - working at the docs with his Father's friends, playing with the stray dogs around whatever town they ended up in. He knew Hannibal was a little less inclined to like it, but Will wasn't going out to buy a whole new aftershave just to use it for a day.

He wasn't sure how'd tonight would play out - Hannibal had slept at Will's apartment only a few times in the past, they'd usually go to Hannibal's place to sleep since Will practically had his own room there at this point. Will wondered if they would part before nightfall, or if Hannibal would not-so-subtly, but successfully convince Will to sleep at his much bigger apartment.

Will understood that Hannibal had some sort of strange mindset, where he thinks manipulation and trickery are the only ways to get people to play his games. But Will didn't mind joining in with Hannibal's rallies, he would still prefer to be asked directly, instead of with subtle word play. Still, both methods would have the same outcome, so really, how you got there wasn't anything to be worrying too much about.

Will moved into the kitchen area of his apartment, and started to take out everything he needed from the fridge.

He takes two bottles, slipping them into a bag that rested on the counter. He then repeated this with a small punnet of strawberries, along with a packet of Cadbury's milk chocolate buttons.

Will looks back down at his wrist, just a few more minutes until Hannibal would be here.

His focus then shifts to the contents of the bag and he sighs. Sharing cheap wine, off season fruit and cheap chocolates wasn't exactly the most top-notch way to spend someone's birthday, especially for someone like Hannibal. Will was upset that he couldn't take the older man somewhere nice, like an expensive restaurant somewhere in London. Hannibal was kind. Even if he didn't enjoy what Will had done for him, he'd never say it.

And with that finishing thought, the low rumble of a car being parked sounded through the air.

Will rushed over to the small window above the kitchen sink to confirm his suspicions. He watched as Hannibal locked the car, smoothing the sleeves of his brown, wool jumper as he did so. The older man turned on his heel and looked up to meet Will's face in the window.

He stares at Hannibal's form, his fine face illuminated by the bright streetlights against the darkening sky.

Will didn't duck down, didn't attempt to bring his face from view like usual. Instead, he kept their eyes together, filling his heart with a familiar sense of warmth.

Hannibal smiled at him, keeping eye contact for as long as possible before disappearing into the building.

A few minutes passed, and in those few minutes panic finally set in. Will's comfortable sense of warmth was swiftly replaced with dread. He'd never been so nervous to see Hannibal, it was as if his body was preparing for something to happen, his mind telling him to get ready.

But for what?

Eventually, three small knocks sounded from the front door. Will took a quick moment to survey the surrounding area. He'd tidied the place up as much as possible, wiped down the counters and shoved anything too difficult to deal with in the old cupboard in the corner of the room. *Everything was in order.*

Well. Except for Will himself.

He strode over to the door, shaking his hands at his sides before pausing in front of it. Taking a deep breath, (a final attempt to collect what he could of himself), Will opened the door.

Hannibal stood in the hallway, handsome as ever with his dark hair draping over one side of his forehead. The usual waistcoat and blazer combo had been replaced with a simple red sweater over a white dress shirt, (clearly what Hannibal considered to be casual, which was paired with dark grey slacks.

"Happy birthday." Will's voice sounded as if he was out of breath. He stepped to the side, hand still on the door as Hannibal nodded politely.

Hannibal stepped through, "Thank you, Will." He turned to the younger man, eyes widening ever so slightly as his small smirk increased.

Will shut the door, his back pressed against it as he folded his arms. "How old is that now, twenty-nine? God, you're an old man."

Hannibal stayed silent, his face unreadable as he looked desperately at Will's.

"Seriously, you okay? I didn't mean to offend you, it was just a jo-" Will's speech was cut off by himself as a familiar touch reached out for his jaw. Hannibal had brought his hand to caress the side of Will's face, his fingers running over the smoothness of Will's skin.

Hannibal spoke with a strangely urgent calmness. “You shaved. Was it a special occasion?” He retracted his fingertips. Will almost missed the touch.

He felt himself subconsciously lowering his head, feeling his face becoming warm at the older man’s actions.

Will forced out a laugh before answering. “I remember you saying that you preferred it to my usual scruff.”

“Just for me? Why, I am flattered..” Hannibal’s voice trailed off towards the end, perhaps without even realising it.

“I’m glad, it was a pain to get it all off.” Will took in Hannibal’s figure, his head still hung to face the floor. He was wearing a full length black coat over his ‘casual’ attire. It made his drawn legs appear even more statuesque.

Will brings them both back to reality as he moves over to the counter. “Wait here, I need to get something.”

Hannibal watches as Will hurriedly strides to his bedroom. “Oh?”

In Will’s bedroom, he reaches under his bed and retrieves the fateful shoe, pulling out a small velvet box from inside of it. He shoves the box into his coat pocket, pushing himself back to his feet with the palms of his hands as he does so.

“What’s in the bag?” Hannibal questions as Will returns, watching as he slips something into it, away from Hannibal’s view.

“Maybe if you’re patient, you’ll see.” Will smirks teasingly, pulling the bag over his shoulder.

“You cunning boy, still keeping secrets from me on my own birthday.” Hannibal stands watching, awaiting Will’s reaction.

He’s met with exactly the outcome he’d hoped for. Will’s breath caught in his throat as he swallowed, along with the nape of neck blushing a delectable pinkish shade.

Will clears his throat, turning his body towards a kitchen cabinet. “It’s not exactly a secret, more of a surprise.” He took out two glasses and made his way over to Hannibal.

“I can’t wait, my dear.” Hannibal was handed the two glasses before Will turned suddenly on his heel, towards the front door.

Hannibal had commonly referred to Will as ‘my dear’ although it had always followed with his name. The sudden change of endearment had Will overthinking every word.

“Please- er, please just follow me. It’s this way.” His voice became quieter towards the end of his speech as he pulled open his front door.

Hannibal followed behind, “Lead on, mylimasis.” His flirty tone had not yet dissipated.

Will lead them up another flight of stairs, before walking down the cold corridor of the final floor. (The building had five stories in total - with Will living on the fourth.) The fifth felt cold, yet the temperature hadn't changed in any way. Brick walls with old paint peeling off of them were covered in dusty cobwebs. It was unlived in, lonely. Even with it being the final floor of the building, Will led Hannibal to yet another set of stairs. The steps were worn and damp. They were made from some sort of industrial metal - the type you'd typically expect to see in a factory.

"Watch your step around these, one or two are a bit uneven." Will said to the man behind him as he began his climb up the strange stairs.

Hannibal simply went along with whatever his dear did, even if that was going up a very shady looking staircase with two wine glasses in his hands. If Will was leading him up to a secret place to murder him, so be it. A truly nirvanic way to die that would be. Although, he couldn't help but grow curious as to what exactly Will was planning.

"Delectable boy, must I ask where you're taking me?" There was a small laugh that came from in front of Hannibal.

"Well, I hope you don't get cold too easily." Will teased, his footing becoming level as he reached the top of the stairs.

Hannibal was close behind, coming to stand beside Will as they reached what he assumed to be their destination. "Lithuania has winters as cold as minus 20 degrees. I'd say I'm used to it."

Pushing open the set of creaking metal doors, Will tilted his head at Hannibal, initiating for him to follow again as he walked through.

Will had led Hannibal to the rooftop of the apartment building. The view stretched over the British scenery, (that being, streets semi-detached houses, roads that lead to nowhere and a whole bunch of trees.) However, the ground below wasn't what Hannibal fixed. He stood for a moment, planting his feet firmly to the cold concrete as he looked up.

"The sky appears different here to how it looks in the city." Hannibal gazed up at the gleaming stars above. The blu-ish tinge of the twinkling lights reminded him of a familiar view.

Hannibal brought his eyes back down from the sky, only to be met with the exact view he'd been picturing.

"It's the only bonus of leaving here, really. It's nicer in the summer, when it's a little warmer - reminds me of home." Their gaze connected for a moment, Will looking back at Hannibal from where he stood in front as he began to walk closer to the edge.

Hannibal followed again, both of them stopping a safe distance from the drop below. "These memories, they're pleasant?" Hannibal was curious of Will's home life, he'd rarely speak of it. Hannibal knew that Will would probably answer any questions he had, however, he didn't

want to get information that way. He wanted his data to be ethically sourced, coming straight from the webs of Will's mind.

Will hummed as he thought, placing the bag he carried down in front of him before taking a seat next to it. "I'd say so. We always lived in the middle of nowhere, miles away from any real cities of civilization. I found beauty only in the sky. The rest came to be the exact opposite."

Hannibal lowered his body to sit beside Will, somehow finding himself not caring about the uncleanliness of the ground. "Do you prefer life now, or perhaps find yourself strangely missing the place you used to call home." He placed the glasses in his hands onto the concrete in front of them.

Will sighed, leaning back on his hands as his head tilted upwards. "Some parts, yeah, I do miss. But that goes for anything really. It's in humanity's nature to miss the past. But for the most part, I'm happy here. My life is nice now. Sometimes it seems as if I've lived an eternity without you."

Hannibal looked to Will, feeling glad that the other man is too focused on the sky to unallow his staring. "I agree. We've spent almost every day together since our first meeting."

"Sometimes I wonder if we'd survive separation." Will let out a small breath of air through his nose in amusement as he smiled to himself. "We've begun to blur."

"And is that so bad? The most beautiful quality of a true friendship is to understand and *be understood* with absolute clarity."

"How poetic."

"Yet there's no denial."

"Why should there be?"

"Artful boy."

Will brought his head back down, turning to face Hannibal, smiling. "You don't mean that, Doctor."

"Isn't it your job to figure out the truth, Detective?" Hannibal said slyly, winking at the end of his sentence.

Will found himself nearly flustered as he moved to reach inside the bag. He pulled out a bottle of wine, he wasn't sure of the brand, just that it wasn't the *cheapest* on the corner shop shelf. He didn't say a word as he poured the beverage into both glasses, passing one to Hannibal.

Hannibal nodded politely as he took the glass from Will. "How romantic of you." Initially, he meant to say thoughtful, however his brain tended to malfunction slightly whenever around Will. Like a magnet disrupting the charge.

Will's face quickly reddens as he flicks his long hair forward in an attempt to cover parts of himself. He forces out a laugh, rearranging his legs only for him to sit back in the exact same position. "May I?" Will sticks the hand carrying the glass out to Hannibal.

"You may."

They brought their glasses together, making a small ringing noise. Will turned his gaze away from the drinks and to Hannibal, deciding eye contact would probably be a need right now. "To you, Happy birthday Hannibal."

Everything was so perfect. Will sat beside Hannibal, staring up into his eyes. The night air was piercingly cold, yet neither of them felt anything.

"Thank you, my dear Will." Hannibal's eyes were gentle and a small smile purged his lips. "All that's missing is some candles to really set the mood."

"Haha. You're hilarious." Will attempted to hold down a smile. "You know if you wanted me to take you on a date you could just say." It was Hannibal's turn to experience the tragedy of not being able to hide a blush.

To Will's surprise, his expression barely changed. His smile only became wider. "Perhaps I'm too nervous."

Will laughed heartily, closing his eyes. "C'mon now Doctor, no need to be." He didn't bother to check Hannibal's next expression, instead choosing to take an unnecessarily long sip of his wine.

Hannibal followed, but instead took small sips every now and then. They sat like that for a while longer, watching the thin clouds of the night cover blinking stars.

"Nobody's ever done such a thing for me before. Thank you, Will." The random comment threw Will off, causing him to quickly swallow whatever remains of liquid in his mouth, nearly choking on it.

"No ones ever done something for your birthday, really?" Will was confused. Surely Hannibal had celebrated this day in many lavish ways before. He remembered last year, Hannibal had left for Japan two days after his birthday to visit his aunt. Surely she'd planned something for him?

"Not exactly, many people have planned events for my birthday. Although my friends soon treated it as a competition, competing to be the person who took me out to the best restaurant, who bought me the most expensive gift." He sighed quietly, looking mindfully into the crimson, swirling liquid of his glass and inhaling the scent deeply. "I was always very grateful, of course. But I knew that none of it ever meant anything."

Will found himself uncontrollably grinning. This had meant something. All the stress of not booking a place to eat, not treating Hannibal to the ways of his luxury lifestyle. There was no need for any of it. "Well, I'll admit I do have a few more surprises for you."

“Oh?” Hannibal watched curiously as Will moved towards the bag, reaching to pull out yet another something.

Will turns back to Hannibal, bringing his hand over and passing a small box to him. It was covered in a layer of black velvet.

Hannibal runs his fingertips over the luxury fabric before untying the white bow that was tied over the box.

Will watches the older man’s face, searching for any change in expression. He watched closely as Hannibal opened the small box.

His eyes became much softer, seemingly more relaxed as they focused on the contents. His sharp fang-like teeth became visible as he broke out into a rare grin.

Hannibal took out the cufflinks, inspecting them as he held on between his thumb and finger.

“They’re beautiful, my dear Will.”

Will’s expression matched Hannibals, grinning uncontrollably as their eyes met. “You like them?”

“I do. I love them.”

Will nodded, watching Hannibal inspect the small present with a pleasant look. “Good, good. They *are* cufflinks, right?”

“Yes, my dear.” Hannibal laughed, taking his eyes off his hands and diverting his gaze to Will. He looked astoundingly beautiful. A soft moonlit glow surrounded the edges of Will’s silhouette, he truly was an ethereal being. His skin was so smooth, not yet tinted with the creases of time. Although, Hannibal couldn’t help but picture a much older, mature version of Will. Oh, how charming he’d be.

“Thank God,” Will looked away from Hannibal's eyes, finding himself unable to bear his gentle gaze. “There was a point where I panicked and thought they could be earrings.”

“Well there’s nothing to worry about, although, now that you mention it - I did consider getting my earlobes pierced at one point.”

“Well I have a needle and a lighter back in the kitchen if you’re still thinking about it.” Will ran his finger around the rim of his glass.

“I think I’ll need just a little more consideration before committing to such a change.” Hannibal looked to the sky. “And how sanitary is your *needle-and-lighter* method?”

Will smirked, running his free hand over the small bumps that covered the outside of his ear. “Always worked for me.”

Hannibal turned to look at Will’s ears, inspecting the pristine skin. They had slowly become physically closer, perhaps without realising it. Hannibal reached out and ran a finger over

Will's cartilage, their hands brushing softly. "Hm. Quite exquisite, perhaps you're studying for the wrong field." The tips of Will's ears had flushed a warm pink colour.

"Becoming a tattoo artist? And have someone trust me to stick a bunch of needles into their skin - goodluck on that one." Will turned to look at Hannibal, the other man's hand retracting from his skin as he did so.

"Although," Will turnt his body to the side, leaning on his hips as he stretched himself. "I did do these by myself - which is like… hard." He lifted his shirt up in one swift motion, looking down to see if the piercings were visible.

Hannibal watched in awe at Will's actions. His lips parted in shock as he discovered what Will was showing him. There were metal bars running through each of Will's nipples. His body inched closer to the younger man, wanting to get a closer look. Will looked proud of himself, obviously more confident with alcohol running through him. "How intriguing." He muttered quietly.

The sight was arousing, no doubt about it. Hannibal had thought about the concept many times before, and now his questions were answered. Will did in fact have *less visible* piercings. Hannibal had these inquiries mainly at night. Alone. In his bed. (Although, a few times in the shower). And each time, the thought of pulling on the small metal bars and wringing desperate whines out of Will had brought him to a deep, satisfying finish.

"You like them?" Will grazed his finger over one of the bars.

Hannibal nodded slowly, his eyes fixated on Will's chest. "Yes. Yes I do."

Will shrugged. "Guys back at home used to tell me they were only for chicks. I don't know though, I guess I've never really cared enough to think about it too much."

Will smiled to himself, pulling his shirt back over to cover his slim torso. He shivered slightly. "Sorry, I didn't really plan for it to be *this* cold."

Hannibal still hadn't completely recovered, his eyes vacant and mouth ajar slightly. "It's quite alright. I feel perfectly warm, if I'm being honest." (A certain part of Hannibal was in fact *very warm*)

Will smiled at Hannibal haziness, finding himself thankful just for the other man's presence.

Perhaps it was the lighting, or the pleasant buzz of alcohol surging through his lightweight system, but Hannibal looked especially *good* right now. The natural pout of his lips, (surrounded by his usual light stubble), looked so very *kissable?*

There wasn't a word that could properly describe how Will was feeling. He'd been drunk with Hannibal plenty of times before, but the current moment felt so different. As if it wouldn't last forever, as if he was running out of time for something. Will felt his heart rate accelerate with these strange thoughts.

He didn't doubt that Hannibal had noticed his staring, the wind fell silent and so did they.

Hannibal's breath drew close, the sound of him breathing becoming louder. Will felt dizzy with anticipation as the older man appeared so near. Will whispered ever so softly, his voice coming out in a breath. "I have to- I need..." He cut himself off as he forced air down his throat, sighing shakily as he licked his lips.

Hannibal's eyes were so dark. The red tinge appeared almost black in the moonlight. The shady windows around the man's pupils reflected the darkness inside of him. Will had only seen it a few times - Hannibal's strange darkness. Will had noticed shortly into their friendship that Hannibal was an actor, with his audience being humanity. He put on a clean facade, never showing his true face to the world, as if he'd put on a costume.

However, on the very few times that Will *had* seen this true face, it had been dreadfully fascinating. The first time he'd noticed Hannibal's act was at the first party they'd attended together. The event that set the foundations of their relationship. Hannibal's hadn't physically changed in any way, yet he looked so different. So real.*So beautiful.*

Will watched as Hannibal glanced down at his own darting tongue. "You need what, my dear?"

Will wasn't sure what he'd meant to say in the first place, words were spilling out of his mouth uncontrollably. He'd have to say something quick, (wouldn't want to make the moment awkward of course).

"Cigarette." Will jolted awake, as if he'd just become aware of his own senses. He pulled his body away to reach inside the bag beside him, pulling out a packet of Marlboro cigarettes. "I bought these, for us- for you."

Hannibal watched in curiosity, a look of bewilderment covering his face as he watched Will frantically shove the pack in his hands, their skin burning together as their fingers brushed.

"You truly did think of everything." His boy was so clever, so thoughtful, and ever so perfect. "Did you bring a lighter?"

Will rolled his eyes as he reached into the bag again. "No, I was thinking we'd unroll them and chew on the tobacco." He slouched back into his position next to Hannibal as he handed him a cheap, pink lighter.

"If that's what you had planned, I'd be happy to play along." Hannibal took the lighter from Will, pulled out two cigarettes, and handed one to the other man. Will accepted with a small nod of his head.

"You'd go along with anything huh? I really do have you on a leash don't I, Doctor." Will smirked, slipping the unlit cigarette into his mouth as he watched Hannibal light his.

Hannibal blew a short puff of smoke out. "Yes you do, mylimasis." He leaned his body closer to Will, the younger man mirroring his actions as Hannibal clicked the lighter to the end of Will's cigarette.

Another silent moment passed, only to be interrupted by a long howl, followed by a short minute of loud barking.

“Have you ever considered getting a dog, Will?” Hannibal spoke into the view in front of them.

Will hummed in thought for a moment. “Not really, no. I’m not sure my building even allows pets. Looking after myself as well as another life would cost too much anyway. Although, I do remember having a cat growing up, when I still lived with Mom.”

Hannibal smiled, he’d like to think of himself as fond of the small animals. “You did? What was their name?”

“Miggs.” Will grinned fondly as he recalled the memory. However, it was quickly replaced by a different expression as Hannibal spoke.

“Were you close to this cat?” Hannibal was genuinely curious. He’d love to see the sight of Will doting over a purring cat.

“Not really, no. I never had the chance - only had her for about a year.”

“Oh? Why is that?”

“I killed her.” Will’s expression was nearly blank, only saved by a small hint of sadness in his eyes.

Hannibal kept his demeanour calm, his face unchanging and his body lax. “How did you do it?” He’d never taken Will as the type of child to find pleasure in killing animals. Will was not a psychopath.

“A strangled her.”

“Was there any particular reason for this?”

Will looked hurt at the fact that Hannibal had insinuated that there may not’ve been a reason for his actions. “My mother, she was- she’d forget to feed her when I wasn’t home. So Miggs would make a racket about being hungry, which obviously annoyed her.”

“Do you think your Mother regretted you getting the cat?”

“No, no. It wasn’t her fault, she easily forgot things and sometimes didn’t understand things that I explained to her.” *He fed himself, so his mother probably expected the cat to do the same. He hunted for his food, so why couldn’t the cat?*

“But, um- eventually I decided Miggs would have a better life somewhere else. I tried just kicking her out once, leaving her to become a street cat or something.” Will inhaled a shaky breath, letting it out with a mist of smoke. “She was violent, didn’t like other people and eventually clawed her way back to me. When she came back she had all this blood matted into her fur, walked with a limp and was pretty skinny. She'd always been a bit frail looking, but I just knew her life was being spent in pain.” A pause. “She still wasn’t quiet, even as she

died. I remember hearing my Mother yelling for me to be quiet over the screams. It wasn't quick and it wasn't painless."

Both men looked into the dark view ahead. Hannibal spoke, his voice steady and deep like usual. "You put her down. A mercy killing, you did what was best." Will shook his head frantically at Hannibal's words, speaking as soon as the other man stopped.

"No, no, no. What was best would be helping her. I murdered some poor cat because I decided her life was too much of a misery. *Like I was one to judge that.*" His tone was filled with anger, voice cracking as words spilled out. "I wanted to help her, I promise. I just- I just couldn't. I knew I couldn't."

Will turned to face Hannibal, red stained eyes filling with small pools of tears. "Hannibal, I- I'm sorry. I don't know, I'm- does that make me a bad person?"

Hearing the emotion in Will's voice, Hannibal automatically turned his head to look at him. There was sadness filled deep into those montague eyes, the striking blue clashing perfectly with the irritated redness surrounding it.

"You feel guilt. Resentment for ending an animal's life." He pauses. "However, the dog that weeps after it kills is no better than the dog that doesn't. Guilt cannot purify you."

"How poetically miserable." Quietness filled the air, an interrupted silence of Will's sorrowful breaths. "It's been how many years now, and I still feel bad about it."

"Perhaps you developed a connection with this animal. You lived a similar life and envied how her's could simply end."

"No, no, you're wrong. I wasn't suicidal Hannibal. I never wanted to fucking kill myself, God. My life might've sucked a little more than everyone else's, but I got through it. I never took the easy way out, okay? Never wanted to. Never considered it."

"You never considered it?"

Will looked stunned, lost for words to reply. "This wasn't supposed to happen." He aggressively wiped a stray tear from his cheek. "This was supposed to be fun. We were supposed to have a good time." His voice was quieter now, much less strained.

Hannibal was situated much closer to Will than the distance they had originally started at. Just an inch separated their shoulders. He hadn't noticed the proximity closing in, however there was no reason to complain about it, so he didn't.

"I've had a good time. I told you, this is perhaps the best birthday I've ever had."

"Yeah, okay. Isn't that what you said to every other one of your *'friends'* that took you out each year. Did you act all sweet and flirty with them as well? Wine and dine them before an interrogation?"

"Will, please." The two words were filled with desperation. "I meant everything I've ever said to you, everything I've ever given. If you don't want any of it, that's okay."

“If I wanted someone to talk to me like this, I could’ve just booked myself into the nearest mental hospital. Maybe you’d visit me sometime and give your own advice to the doctors.” Will stood up dramatically, swaying on his feet as he looked up to the sky. “You’d love that wouldn’t you. Going around giving your opinion of me, must be some sort of wet dream.” He was smiling.

Hannibal placed the glass in his hand back down on the floor and followed quickly, standing up and grabbing Will by his arm. The younger man flinched away, jerking his head back down to look at Hannibal.

“Will please, that isn’t true and you know it. The world’s more interesting with you in it, so please take care to extend me the same courtesy.”

Will stared at him through his eyebrows, eyes dark and set. “You know I can’t make that promise.”

“I don’t care for what you can and can’t do. I don’t care how complicated this gets. I still want you. I want the side of you that you don’t show anybody else.”

“Quid pro quo, Doctor.”

“We could leave. Tomorrow morning.”

“What are you talking about? I can’t just leave, I have to actually attend classes to become successful you know.”

“I have tickets for a flight tomorrow, one for both of us. You’d be back in America by tomorrow evening.”

“Hannibal, what are you talking about?” Will’s expression was serious, with a tinge of anger and confusion.

Hannibal, however, seemed excited with hope. “Please my dear. Everything at my house is already packed into suitcases, we’d pick up the luggage then head straight to the airport.”

Will stood in silence, glaring a deep hole into Hannibal’s pupils.

“You’d never have to work a day in your life. I’d take care of everything for you. I’d pay for your own housing, unless of course you’d like to live with me. I promise, everything will finally be perfect.”

Nothing.

Will did consider it for a moment. It was the life he found himself constantly dreaming of. His version of a white-picket fence. Everything would be as genuinely perfect as Hannibal described, he didn’t doubt that for a minute.

“Will? Look, if there’s anything you’re worried about, please, I’m sure I’ll have a solution. I mean- you could see your father agai-”

Glass shattered over the damp concrete as Will lost his grip, creating a pool of crimson and crystal around his feet. “Have you listened to anything I’ve ever said?”

It was Hannibal’s turn to stand in silence.

Will’s voice grew with anger, his volume raising and tears returning. “I’m not a charity case Hannibal. I don’t need you. I can’t depend on you. I am my own person.”

“But you don’t have to be, we could be one - joined in flesh.”

“Really? You’re going to start quoting the bible back to me. Wow, you really won me over there. Well done.”

“You wouldn’t ever be looked down upon, people would fear our power, the same way Zeus feared man. He split humans into two parts, halving their power and condemning them to spend their lives searching for their other half. Our greatness would be unmatched after finally finding ourselves whole.”

“I don’t care what you believe in, I’m not your ‘soulmate’.” Will gestured quotations with his fingers. “We are two very, very different people. Nothing will ever change that.”

“Please, Will. We could leave everything here behind. I’ve been offered an internship at John Hopkins medical school, I’ll finish the last year of my education there and then I’ll be making enough to very comfortably support the both of us.”

“Good for you Hannibal. I’m so happy that your life will go so well, and I hope you die as happy as you live.”

“I’d be even happier if that life were to be spent with you.”

“*Why* Hannibal, why? I don’t understand why you won’t just leave me already.”

“You said so yourself. We won’t survive separation.”

“C’mon, that’s just some stupid metaphor. You won’t actually die if you leave, you know?”

“I’ve come to realise something new about myself lately.”

Nothing

“I never understood the concept of love. I believed it was something that humans convince themselves to be real just to spare themselves from loneliness. However, since meeting you it seems my understanding of the world has been opened.”

Will laughed. A short breathless laugh void of emotion. “What a way to kiss your knuckles after punching me in the face.”

“Please, Will. I don’t think I’ll be able to go on without you.”

“Then don’t. If you’re really that desperate, don’t fucking leave. Either way, I don’t care. It’s your life, I’m not *forcing* you to do anything.”

“If I leave now, I couldn’t die happy tonight.”

“You want this don’t you? That’s why you’re begging so desperately. If something is that important to you, you need to chase it. I want what’s good for you Hannibal.”

“What would be good for me, was if you were to join me.”

“No, that’s what you would like. And unfortunately, there’s somethings in the world that you just can’t have.”

“Please. I can’t understand what’s stopping you from coming with me. You wouldn’t need to graduate, wouldn’t ever need to work a job. I’d provide everything for you. Please, my dear.”

Will inhaled a shaky breath, finding himself able to finally move his feet, only to step into a shard of glass. He hid the wince of pain. “I thought you’d understand. *I need to graduate. I need to get a job, a good one.* I need to prove myself.”

“To whom, mylimasis? I already see your talent, your drive. I’ve seen your dedication and the beautiful inner workings of your brain. There is nothing you need to prove.”

Will brought a hand to his face, dragging his fingers over his skin harshly. “God, Hannibal - not everything in my life revolves around you, you know? *I’m my own person.* How many times will I have to repeat myself before it goes into your fucking head?”

“You’re drunk, Will.” Hannibal’s voice was blank and void of any hope.

“Oh no. No, trust me, I sobered up a *long* time ago. I sobered up as soon as you announced you had already planned my future for me. Guess it really woke me up. Opened my eyes!”

“We should discuss this in the morni-” Hannibal barely made it through his sentence before being interrupted.

“What is there to discuss? I’m not coming with you. You’re leaving tomorrow morning. That’s that.” Will waited for a reply, holding his breath with clenched fists. The once lit cigarette was now crushed and discarded along with the shards of broken glass.

That was that. Hannibal knew it was over. He’d spent nights in his mind palace, planning out his future days with Will, assuming that he’d automatically agree to his arrangements. However, Hannibal had made one mistake, one very fatal mistake at that. He hadn’t taken into account Will’s desires. He’d only thought about himself, the rush of nirvana that Will’s presence had given him over these years had made him selfish with want.

“Look, maybe- I don’t know- under some magical circumstances, whatever *this* was,” Will gestured to himself and Hannibal with his hands. “could’ve worked out.”

“Maybe it still can.” Hannibal barely whispered, a small fragment of hope returning to his voice.

Will smiled. A smile of sadness - one of regret. “Maybe.”

They both knew the actual answer. The past couple of years had been beautiful. Their relationship wasn’t one to ever be forgotten. Yet, nothing good ever lasts forever. Beautiful things will always shrivel up and die.

With that last word, Will walked away. He ignored the sharp pains below his feet, the cut skin of his soles becoming numb under his weight.

The remaining hours of Will’s night were spent locked away in his room. He’d left the door open, with a pity of hope that something would change. Long moments of Will’s sobs echoed around the empty walls of the dark room.

Morning light crept up on him, with cracks of brightness illuminating through Will’s ripped curtains. He screwed his eyes tight, unable to bear the sight of the world. Everywhere he looked, something reminded him of Hannibal. The sprawled out crime scene paper over his floor that they had meticulously analysed. Randomly stuck up polaroids of Hannibal that had been used to cover cracks and stains on the walls. Everywhere Will looked, a painful reminder stared right back into him.

-Espoir-

The next couple of days were spent in pain. Will didn’t attend his classes, he didn’t even leave the house for that matter. He lived off of whatever stale food he could find in the bare cabinets of his kitchen.

The bag he’d taken up to the roof laid sadly by the door. Will had discovered it the afternoon after the incident, when he finally decided to leave his room. *What a gentleman.* Will had thought. *After everything that went down, Hannibal still chose to be the bigger person. How typical.*

The apartment smelt strongly of cigarette smoke, since Will spent the majority of his time sitting against the door making his way through the pack they were supposed to share.

After deciding it was finally time to get his shit together on the fourth day of moping about, Will started on cleaning out that fateful bag.

He picked it up and moved back over to the kitchen counter to sort the contents out. Will was preparing himself for the pungent smell of rotten strawberries when a white glint from the corner of his eye caught his attention.

Dropping his focus from the bag to this strange new addition, Will strolled back over to the door and picked up a small, white piece of folded paper.

He turned it over.

Will.

He'd recognise that handwriting anywhere.

Will unfolded the small note, and another slip of paper fell out. He leaned down to the floor, sighing as he picked it up.

A ticket from London, England to Baltimore, Maryland.

A ticket for the 21st of January.

Even if Will did have a sudden change of heart, it would mean nothing now. All the ticket was, was a reminder. A reminder of what could've been. A reminder of who is gone. A reminder of who is not coming back. A reminder of how alone he was.

Shifting back to the other piece of paper in his hand, Will unfolded the last crease of the note and stared at the cursive handwriting inside.

There were just ten words written on the white background.

'Lest I hope we meet again, but never part. Mylimasis.'

Time was forgotten, only to be suddenly remembered as warm wetness rained onto Will's hand, bringing him back to harsh reality. His own tears stained the blankness of the paper, beautiful inkwork becoming smudged with saltiness.

This was it.

Chapter End Notes

I really do apologise for the lateness of this chapter. Of course, it is a whole lot longer than the usual updates.

Also, just a question for future references - How would people feel if I replaced Will's dogs with cats? I feel it wold make more sense as he'd be able to spend a lot more time away from home (and with a certain someone). Please let me know if it's a horrific idea or not.

As always, thank you for reading and please let me know any feedback you have!!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> Just like to point out now, there are a few references to The silence of the lambs and Red Dragon, however you really don't have to have watched/read either of them to understand everything.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was coming close to the ninth week of nothingness.

An entire two months of spare time, that of which Will had no clue how to use.

So far, he'd mainly spent this time surrounded by whatever animals accompanied him on fishing trips at the start of the day. Then of course, you can't forget the end of the day - where he would cook whatever he'd caught, then feed the leftovers to any animals who had taken a liking to fish. (Which was basically all of them).

Any day now, Will would get the dreaded call from Jack Crawford.

His voice would be riddled with the usual unprovoked anger, and any answer that Will gave just wouldn't be the correct one. *That's the thing with Jack Crawford. He's a shouty man who always has to be right.*

Wil had only met with Jack Crawford a few times, three or four instances maybe. And each time, he could only describe these meetings as stressful.

Every word that came out of Crawford's mouth managed to add another weight into Will's mind of worry.

Jack had frequently mailed case files directly to Will over his weeks of recovery. Photographs of dead teenage girls - nothing new of course. He clearly had no intention of letting Will's *mind* recover, otherwise he wouldn't keep sending the detailed reports of the brutal ways in which these girls were lured to their deaths.

Although, Will suspected the rest of the behavioural science team would somehow convince Jack to tone it down a level - considering his current *circumstances.*

In truth, Will had missed parts of his job. (Others not so much).

He missed the small coffee breaks with Beverely Katz - she was one of the few people who had taken the time to genuinely try to know Will. She ignored his differences and treated him

like a coworker, rather than a tool. Will considered them friends.

He also missed the distraction of his classroom, and the way his brain was able to turn off for an hour or so in those enclosed walls.

What he certainly hadn't missed were Jack's long, pointless meetings and speeches. He hadn't missed the cold chill of the morgue that accompanied the lingering smell of death. He would never miss the terrified stares from his coworkers - looking at him as if *he* was the one who'd brutally murdered the teenage girl in front of them.

Catching the *Buffalo Bill killer* had been a success that took just under a year to complete. It was also a success that had ended with the FBI's renowned profiler in a psychiatric hospital.

Will had spent the first five weeks of his time off in this hospital to recover from his injuries and what doctor's considered to be a 'traumatic experience.'

Then, after a not-so-smooth recovery from a stab wound, Will was transferred to a psychiatric ward and put under the watchful eye of the most pretentious people he's ever met for another two months.

The last weeks of his time off was so he could 'stay out of the public eye'. *Tattlecrime* had been a ruthless broadcast of Graham's problems - constantly writing new articles of his situation, speculating the progress of his recovery.

Will had been told to keep a low profile, which according to the rules he'd been given, wasn't so different from his normal life.

Will wondered if Freddie Lounds would be so bothered to come to his house and take pictures of him fishing with a flock of cats. She'd probably write some stupid headline, like, *'Deranged profiler spotted fishing for feline. Has he officially lost it?'*

Will did somewhat remember an old article that Freddie wrote of him, one of the first he'd seen. It was basically just a whole essay of calling Will insane, and how he wasn't fit to be working for the FBI. Which was, in Will's eyes, fair. However, her source of his 'insanity' was a photograph of him taking one of his cats for a walk. Whether or not that was a trait of an insane person - there was sure to be different opinions.

Although, there was no telling if she had in fact written another one of her well-sourced articles.. Will wasn't sure how he'd even access Tattlecrime. His phone was a cheap nokia, supplied to him from the FBI. And he didn't have any other technology lying around in the house. There had been an old television when he'd first moved in, but it'd stopped working years ago and now stood more as a decorative piece collecting dust and cat hair.

Speaking of, it was beginning to get dark out and wouldn't be long before Will would be deafened by a choir of six hungry cats.

Standing up from where he sat in the middle of the field, Will turned around and began walking back to his house, thinking about what he'd feed himself when he got in.

There was a severe lack of food in the kitchen - half a bag of pasta, a few apples, some beef jerky and a stale loaf of bread was all Will could think of. *Not exactly a hearty meal.*

Just as he suspected, Will was greeted by the sound of wailing felines. There were two just outside the front door, which he clicked his tongue at as a way to signal them to follow. The other four animals sat scattered throughout Will's living room, (which was now more of a living, bed, cat and dining room).

Will hadn't left the general vicinity of his Wolftrap home in nearly two weeks now. He'd gone out shortly after his release from the psychiatric wing of Bethesda Naval Hospital, just to pick up a bulk load of perishable foods and toiletries.

After feeding the cats, (a food source of which he made from scavenging and whatever small animals he could manage to catch, *e.g. Squirrels, rabbits and fish*), Will poured himself a finger of whatever whiskey he had left in the cupboards. His Doctor's had advised him to stay off alcohol for at least another few weeks or so, however, the Doctors had also advised him to stay another month in the hospital. Yet here he was.

Will strolled past the plethora of cat beds and heaters to sit outside by his front door. There was a singular wooden chair out on the small porch, which he took a seat at. Taking slow sips of his drink, Will reflected on everything that had happened, and everything that was to come.

He'd been getting the usual nightmares of Buffalo Bill's victims every night. That was nothing new. These dreams had caused him to wake up sweating profusely, although that was happening much less than usual. It was more common to wake up simply out of breath, which must be a good sign.

Perhaps his trip to the loony bin had actually benefited him in some way?

However, whether he'd continue to recover was based purely on the next couple of days. Will hadn't received a call from Jack today, which means there'd definitely be one tomorrow. This call could either let him know that he'd be expected at his next lecture at the academy. Or, in the case that Jack Crawford simply couldn't change his morals, he'd be expected at the next crime scene that appeared. Where, of course, he'd have to take a deep dive into the workings of a killer's mind. Therefore, restarting the whole cycle again.

Obviously, neither option could be considered *'positive'*. However, spending hours a day talking about a crime scene would do him much more good than actually being at the crime scene.

Will carried on these thoughts of contemplation as he heard the snap of a small, plastic door swinging open. He'd installed the cat door a few hours after he'd found Ellie - his first stray. She was your average British long haired cat. Will assumed that she'd originally been domesticated and thought that she could possibly be a missing cat, but after seeing no collar and finding no chip when taking her to the vet, he decided that until someone came forth to claim her, he could take care of her.

This cycle of finding strays continued over the course of years. Will would occasionally find these raggedy animals, check to see if they'd been marked as missing, if not, he'd take them in as his own. This routine now cost him to share his house with six other cats, one of which was now nuzzling its face into Will's shoulder as it perched carefully on the arm of his chair.

He used his free hand to stroke over the cat's ear. Will had found Buster when he was still a small kitten. He wasn't sure of the exact breed of the cat, just that he was a small, scraggly looking thing with half an ear missing.

Deciding that it'd be better to try and get a little more sleep than usual, Will downed the last few sips of his whiskey and picked up Buster with one arm. The cat rested on his shoulder with Will's calloused hands supporting him.

Buster meowed loudly as Will used his foot to open the door and walk back inside. He shushed the cat, the same way a parent would to a crying baby.

Still holding his furry friend, he set down the used glass on the kitchen counter, deciding that washing it up will be a task for future Will.

Now having a free hand, he scratched in between the cat's ears gently whilst walking slowly over to a free cat bed.

Will walked over to his bed, which sat lonely in the corner of the room next to a set of drawers, which he plucked one of his many white shirts from.

The digital clock read 7:25, which universally, is quite an early time for a middle aged man to sleep. But Will knew he'd spend the next couple of hours laying awake, so it was better to begin the process earlier.

He changed into just the white shirt and his underwear, leaving his dirty clothes hanging off the side of a cardboard box which he designated as his 'laundry basket'.

Will had only been lying in his bed for what he felt was twenty minutes, before he heard a small buzz vibrate through the air.

At first, he suspected it was his alarm, and that by some miracle he'd managed to sleep through an entire night without waking up in a cold sweat. However, with further inspection and a quick rummage through his trouser pockets, he discovered it was his phone.

Will flipped the screen open and answered, he waited for the other person to speak first.

"Hello? Will, are you there?" Jack Crawford's familiar voice spoke through the other line.

Will sighed to himself, making sure to hold the phone away as he did so. "Yes. What do you need?" It was safe to assume that Jack was only ever calling because he needed something from him.

"Good to see you're making a smooth recovery, Graham." Will rolled his eyes. *How on earth would Jack even know if he was actually getting better or not?* It was now safe to say that Jack Crawford's morals had not changed in any way, and he had long deemed Will ready to

be back. “I’m hoping we’ll see you back tomorrow?” It was less of a question and more of a command.

“You will?” Will nearly argued back, but his body was still trying to sleep and didn’t quite have the energy to fight.

“Yes. My office, I’m sure you know we have a lot to speak about. I could send an officer over to drive you if you’re still not fit?” So he *did* know that Will wasn’t quite finished with his recovery.

Will was sat on the edge of his bed, elbows leaning on his bare thighs. “No, no, it’s fine. What time do you need me?” He didn’t say anything else on the matter of his health, he wanted Jack to find out that much in person.

“If you could make it for ten, that’d be perfect.” Again, not a question, not an option. Even if Will couldn’t make it for ten, Jack would still find a way.

Will hummed in agreement. “Mm, that’s fine. I’ll see you then.”

“Alright. Goodbye Will.”

Will clicked the phone shut, not bothering to return farewells. He didn’t see the point. They weren’t friends, that much was known by both parties.

Half-slamming the phone to the small table by his bed, Will slumped back into his mattress. He wondered what Jack had in store for him. It obviously wasn’t as simple as ‘return to your classroom’, that matter didn’t require a meeting with the head of the behavioural science unit. He tried not to think too much about it, hoping that the drift of the day would guide him through tomorrow.

Will was already awake when he heard the distressing blare of his alarm. He looked from where he sat, on the floor with a black cat in his lap, over to the clock. 8:30AM. He had woken a few hours prior after a nightmare involving him stuck at the bottom of a pit, just like the last girl he’d saved from Buffalo Bill.

Instead of trying to go back to sleep, (which Will knew would be pointless), he carried on working on the boat motor that he’d had laying outside the house for quite some time.

He set down the screwdriver from his hand, giving a final stroke to the black cat in his lap before standing up and placing her on one of the chairs by the fireplace. He moved swiftly back to his bed, turning off the alarm. His bedsheets aren’t as disgustingly wet with sweat as usual. There’s no Will-shaped-wet-patch, which is progress.

Will stretched his arms over his head, taking a deep breath of stale air as he did so. He’d gotten about four hours total of sleep, which was almost definitely a record for the recent weeks. At one point, he’d considered looking up how people got babies to sleep through a full night - that’s how desperate he was to wake up feeling ‘refreshed’ for once.

A headache threatened to plague his body, which prompted him to shower, with the hope that warm water would somehow relax his mind.

Will washed his hair with an unscented shampoo, it was the cheapest thing in the stores and did its job. It was the same with his soap - a cheap, linen scented body wash, nothing special.

The shower, of course, did nothing to diffuse Will's growing headache. In fact, he was quite sure that it may have made it worse.

He spends the rest of his time preparing himself for whatever today has to throw at him. The morning isn't spent in complete silence. Will talks to his cats throughout his routine, occasionally stopping to pick one up or scratch behind another's ears.

They brought a light of hope into his sad little life. Something to get back to when he's out. Will had always had a goal that he worked towards in his life - whether that be finishing highschool to move away from his Father, graduating university to prove his worth or just getting himself a stable job. However, Will was also aware that all of these events had ended in ways that he wouldn't consider to be 'good'.

Moving from The States to England had left Will alone with practically no money. His 'stable job' had ended with irreversible trauma and a stab wound. And of course, university hadn't ended very well. Still, he ended the experience with a Doctorate in forensic science, so the main goal had been completed.

Will doesn't bother eating anything after he gets dressed, he's never had much of an appetite in the morning anyway - or at all. If it wasn't for the fact he'd be driving in a few minutes, he'd probably be downing a morning glass of cheap whiskey.

Before leaving to start the 35 mile drive to the academy, Will sets out enough cat food for the day in the plethora of bowls. He also sets out two bowls of water, however, the animals always seem happy enough to drink from the river by his house anyway.

Will makes sure to lock the door behind him and starts the car up, feeling thankful that the engine actually turns on after the lack of use.

The drive to Quantico is as uneventful as expected. Usual amount of unnecessary traffic, people who clearly shouldn't have a licence on the road, and Will's banged up car only stalled four times. *Again, uneventful.*

Will arrives at the academy at 9:40. Whatever Sex Pistols song was playing from the radio came to a stern halt as the engine did. Picking up the laptop carrier from the seat next to him, Will used his foot to open the car door as he climbed out.

There wasn't a class until early afternoon today, so his room should be empty, allowing him to set everything back into place in peace.

The hallways are as empty as they usually get in the morning, with most trainees either in a lecture, or doing some sort of training course outside. As promised, Will's classroom was completely empty.

He starts by setting his laptop on the desk, then plugging the ancient thing in. Knowing its battery life, it had probably gone into minus numbers somehow - so charging it up could take a few hours.

Will's just about to start organising the graded papers in his drawers when he sees movement from ahead.

Keeping his head down, facing the desk, Will sits onto his chair before finally looking up.

Jack Crawford was walking towards him, giving one of those polite smiles people always feel necessary to do. In retaliation to this, Will quickly reaches into the inside pockets of his grey blazer, to pull out a pair of glasses, which he swifty slips over his face.

"Special agent Jack Crawford," Jack puts his hand out, expecting Will to shake it. Will grips the other man's hand for barely a second before quickly pulling back to himself. "I head the behavioural science unit. I sent you the case files?" Jack awaits his recognition.

"I know. We've met." Will says shortly, his gaze avoidant of Crawford's eyes.

Jack waits a second, as if he expects Will to carry his sentence onto something else. "Yes…" He sighs. "I've been informed of your adventures with Buffalo Bill, and I've been meaning to speak with you ever since."

Will has to stop himself from rolling his eyes. "Well I'm sure you've also been informed on how those adventures ended for me."

Jack took no notice of Will's sarcastic reply. "I see you've hitched your horse to a teaching post." He lowered his frame, almost getting in Will's face as he tried to match their eyes. "I also understand that it's difficult to be social?" The last part, Will knew, was questioning his ability to teach with his lack of social skills.

"It's more talking at them. I'm not listening, nor am I conversing. It's not social." He wasn't sure why he was having to explain such a thing to someone he barely knew.

An uncomfortable silence fell over the room as Will impatiently fixed his glasses. Something told him that Crawford knew the lenses were fake.

"Where do you fall on the spectrum?"

Smooth. Jack asked the question as if he was talking about the weather. "Somewhere close to aspergers and autistics." Will said tirelessly, as if he was sick of answering such a thing. "I'm not a narcissist or a sociopath, despite what rumours you may have heard."

Will meant his last comment as a joke, but Jack's lack of amusement suggested he may be onto something. (He's come back to work with everyone thinking he's a psycho.)

“But you can empathise with narcissists and sociopaths-”

“I can empathise with anybody. Less to do with a personality disorder than an *active imagination*.” Will cut him off, again answering the question on autopilot.

“Well,” Will knew that whatever was about to come out of Jack’s mouth, was definitely not something along the lines of *’-you get back to your teaching now, Graham. Have a good life.’* He rubbed his fingers to the bridge of his nose at the thought. “Can I borrow your imagination?”

The headache that had started to form as soon as Jack walked in had officially reached its full potential. The container of painkillers in Will’s pocket called to him. “Show me what you’ve got and maybe I’ll consider lending it to you.”

Jack smiled and nodded at him thankfully. “Very well. Let’s get going then.” He turned around, clearly expected Will to heal like a dog as he walked away.

Regretfully, Will stood up. He took one last look at the quiet, empty classroom, then followed.

Jack took Will up to speed on the situation as they walked through the halls of the academy. Eight girls have been abducted, presumed dead.

Their one-sided conversation continued into Jack’s office, with them standing in front of a map of Minnesota - surrounded by pictures of the missing teenage girls.

Will took his glasses off, slipping them back into his blazer as he inspected the board in front of him. He told Jack as much as he could without slipping into another’s mind, making observations of the girls’ similarities and the killer’s patterns.

“So is he warming up for his golden ticket or just reliving what he did to her?” Jack questioned as he stared at the pictures of the girls.

Will felt frustrated. He hated having to get involved with new people, because new people meant new explanations - and he couldn’t explain how his mind worked. He decided he’d just talk, let the words that flowed out his mouth do the explaining. “He’d hide her - how special she was. It’s not about all the girls, it’s about just one of them. Hidden between all these selections is his true victim. *His golden ticket.*”

“You figured out that much just now?” Jack seemed more confused than impressed.

Will shook his head as he backed away from the photos in front of him. “I looked over the files you sent me. I’ve had a lot of free time recently.”

“And you never thought of giving me a call?” Jack turned back to look at Will. Will kept his eyes trained ahead, avoiding the other man’s gaze.

“No.” He wanted this conversation to end. He wanted to leave.

“Why not?”

“I didn’t call you because I didn’t want to- you have Bloom at the University of Chicago. She does the same thing I do.

“And I’ve got you - 40 miles away, fixing boat motors in Virginia with some cats.”

“I don’t think I’d be all that useful to you Jack, my imagination hasn’t been *oiled* in a while.” Will spoke bitterly.

Jack was determined. “Really? You caught the last one we had.”

“By doing the same things you and the rest if them are doing-”

“But that’s not true, Will. Is it?”

Will tried to look at Jack, but the faces of the missing girls behind him seemed as if they were taunting him. He met the other man with silence, not sure if he was actually supposed to respond to the question.

“It’s the way you think.” Jack answered himself.

Will scoffed, once again finding himself holding back an eye roll. “I’m guessing there's been a lot of discussion on the way I think whilst I’ve been away. Did no one ever teach you that it’s rude to speak about others behind their back-”

Jack cut him off, ignoring Will’s last comment yet again. “You’ve made jumps you’ve never explained-”

It was Will’s turn to cut someone off. “No no. The evidence *explains*.” He was getting frustrated at Jack. Exactly what he thought was going to happen was happening. It was all explanations. Explanations that led to *fuck all.* Will’s hands tensed at his sides as he flicked his fingers agitatedly over themselves.

Jack Crawford heard the rhythm and syntax of his own speech in Graham’s voice. He had heard Will do that before, with other people. Often in intense conversation he took on the other person’s speech patterns. At first, Jack thought that he’d been doing it deliberately, that it was a gimmick to get the back-and-forth rhythm going.

Later, Crawford realised that Will did it involuntarily, that sometimes he tried to stop and couldn’t. He sighed and cracked his neck to the side. “Then help me find some evidence.”

Will breathed a quick and heavy breath in and looked around the room, as if there was something there that would somehow save him. He sucked his tongue over his teeth before opening his mouth to speak. “That may require me to be sociable.” He nearly whispered the words, as if he was embarrassed or didn’t want to hear them come from himself.

“These are all dead, Will.” Jack motioned to the board in the room, trying to get through to him. “If you couldn’t look at it anymore, God knows I’d understand that.”

“No. It’s not that. I could make myself look, but I’d shut down the thinking.”

“I’m meeting with the family of the eighth girl this evening. You’ll come with me, then we’ll decide from there what you can do.”

Will felt like a child being told to go into school after announcing that he was sick- being told to ‘walk off’ his illness. He knew there was no objection to Jack’s demands. Even if he claimed that there was a chance that Will could go back to his old life, teaching students and having normal hours. It was all just the illusion of choice. *’We’ll* decide from there’ actually meant, ‘I’ll decide when I need you from there’.

Will knew there was no point in him pointing out this fact, Jack would shrug it off somehow - always did.

He went back to his classroom, setting up everything for the first and only lecture of the day - mentally and physically preparing himself, not only for the class, but also for everything that was to come in the evening. Will knew for a fact that it wouldn’t be easy. Jack wasn’t the type of man to just give up. There was no such thing as ‘no evidence’ for him. Everything just had to have an explanation, didn't it.

After a few hours of idle research through the Minnesota case, students began to file into their seats, their voices coming to an abrupt silence as they realised their actual professor was back. Apparently, whoever had been covering Will’s lessons must’ve been a little less ‘strict’.

He could sense their stares throughout the hour. His students definitely weren’t focused on the dead teenagers he was talking about, that much was apparent from the glances around the room and eyes that were set on Will, rather than the projector behind him. He was sure that the only notes being taken were ones used to pass around and communicate with other students.

Will didn’t mind though. He was paid to teach and explain cases, and mark papers. He wasn’t paid to parent and teach manners.

He finished off the lesson by requesting an essay. “Think about killing Mrs Marlow.” Will already knew that his students found him strange. He’d heard enough hallway gossip to know that he was considered ‘creepy’. “Why did she deserve this? Tell me your design.” He clicked off the projector and shut down his laptop. “Tell me who you are.”

The trainees took this as a sign to leave, which they did with immediate effect. Will was self-aware enough that he knew that every conversation between the students in his class in the next couple of minutes would be about him. He didn’t enjoy being ‘the talk of the town’ per say, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Amidst the rustling of students, Will regrettably spotted Jack Crawford. They made eye contact which Will quickly broke by looking back down at his closed laptop. *What on earth could he want now?*

“Graham, that was the last class of the day for you. You’re free now.”

Will wondered if Jack had been waiting outside his classroom, and if so, how long for? “Yes. Which is exactly why I’m packing up to head home.” Jack began to speak again but Will

quickly cut him off before he got a word out. “I’ll still meet you wherever you want me later, I just don’t want to spend the next five hours here.”

Jack frowned and shrugged. “Change of plans. I’ll give you the rundown on the way.”

Will took a deep breath, knowing there was no way out of it. A deep part of him wanted to cry, but of course, he locked that away. Instead, he nodded and carried on getting ready to leave, only this time, there was no promise of a house full of cats waiting for him

As promised, Will was given a rundown on the current situation by Jack Crawford in one of the FBI’s SUVs before being shoved onto a plane.

The most recent assumed victim of this killer was, of course, a teenage girl who fit the profile of all the others. Will was accompanying Jack to interview the girl’s parents, then he was expected to use his empathy to figure out anything more on the situation, since he had yet to physically be at a crime scene.

The sky was darkening in the evening, however, a warm humidity accompanied the grey clouds.

As soon as he made his way up to the front door of the girl’s house, Will knew the cycle was beginning again. It came like the seasons - something new would start, at first it’d seem like a small thing, nothing important. That’s when it would catch Will by his skin, ripping his seams and pulling everything from him. It was a cycle he couldn’t break. There simply was no way around it - his own, personal groundhog day.

The girl, - Elise Nichols - her family lived in what Will considered to be a nice house. Her parents clearly had more money than average, they lived a comfortable life in a fairly big house. *It’s so much more devastating when a rich person dies.*

Jack does the majority - if not all - of the interviewing. The sound of his voice is distant and muffled as Will stares absently off into a corner. His tone is solemn and empathetic, the way you’d expect someone to speak to the parents of a newly deceased child.

The parents asked the classic, stupid questions. *’Could Elise still be alive?’* As if there was anyway to confirm that. And either way, the answer they got would be upsetting. If she was dead, she was dead. If she was alive, she was alone somewhere - or worse - with someone with not-so-great intentions.

Will was bored of this circle of conversation, it wasn’t going anywhere. “How’s the cat?” He spoke without his body even facing the others.

The Mother responded. “What?” She looked from Will to Jack, as if to get some explanation for the other strange agent's behaviour.

Will didn’t have to look at Jack to know he had rolled his eyes. “How’s your cat?” He repeated. “Elise was supposed to feed it.” It was clear now that Will should’ve maybe kept

his mouth shut and let the boring conversation bring itself somewhere. Still, he tried to continue with wherever he was taking this. “Was the cat… weird when you got home? It must’ve been hungry. It didn't eat all weekend.” *Poor thing.* He wanted to add.

The situation made him think of his own cats, at home, all alone. Will had called a neighbour, asking them to use the spare key and feed them tonight. So hopefully, they’d all forgive him when he got back.

Mr and Mrs Nichols looked at each other in confusion, shrugging. The father spoke up. “I didn’t notice.”

Will curled his arms tight to his body, folding them over each other. He nodded his head shakily at the grieving man and looked back over to Jack expectantly. Jack met his eyes, (only for a moment before Will stared off behind the other man’s shoulder), he looked at Will as if to ask, *’What the fuck was all that about?’*

“Will you give us a moment, please.” Jack said as kindly as possible to the couple.

Will followed Jack into the hallway. He bit his lip in unconscious nervousness before speaking. “He took her from here.” Will had actually worked this much out during the early stages of that long, boring interview. “And-” He sighed a weary breath. “She got on the train, she- she came home, fed the cat. Then he took her.” Will noticed Jack close his eyes and purse his lips as the cat was mentioned again.

Jack nodded, taking no time to take out a phone from his pocket. He dialled a few numbers before speaking loudly into the device. “The Nichols’ house is a crime scene.” Will watched as the two residents in the other room breathed heavily and covered their faces in their palms. “I need ERT immediately. I want Zeller, Katz and Jimmy Price.”

Will’s blank expression lighted slightly at the mention of those three people. He’d become closer with them to anyone he had in a while. They’d worked in parts of Will’s previous case - and Katz had developed a more personal friendship with Will, with them occasionally going to bars together after workdays. She was nice, and treated Will like a normal person.

Will looked to Elise’s parents, the Father had just said something - Will didn’t care for it. “Can I see your daughter’s room?”

He was taken upstairs by Mr Nichols. The man moved to open the door, but Will’s gloved hand quickly stopped him. “No. I’ll get that. Please put your hands in your pockets and avoid touching anything.”

“But we’ve been in and out of here all day.”

Will wasn’t sure how to respond. *Did you not just hear the scary FBI guy announce that your house is a crime scene?* Was what he wanted to say. Instead, he settled on, “You can hold the cat if it’s easier.” Will pointed his head in direction to the cat scratching at the wall next to them.

As expected, in her bed, lay the body of Elise Nichols. Clearly, this was an unknown fact to her Father, as he instantly lurched forward, only to be caught quickly in Will's grasp. He hated to touch people, especially when it was so unneeded. The man dropped the cat from his arms and Will had to stop himself from bending down and bringing it into his own hold.

Photographers, investigators, reporters, medics and everyone else showed up to the scene as quick as the news spread to Jack.

Thankfully, Will was left alone after a strangely comforting reassurance from Jack in the girl's room. He let the pendulum swing, taking on the crime as his design, mixing his own mind with the killer's. It felt just about as good to do as it did eight months ago.

One moment, he was on the bed, strangling the teenage girl that lay atop it. The next, he was snapped out of his trance by a familiar voice.

"Will Graham?"

He replied without his eyes focusing on the other person in the room. "You're not supposed to be in here." He was still out of breath from mentally asphyxiating a person.

"I found antler velvet in two of the wounds, weird right?"

The person who stood in front of Will was Beverly Katz. She was possibly the best person who could've interrupted his process, he was relieved.

"You still not real FBI?" She sounded upset, surprised that he'd gone through everything just to be classed as 'special' agent.

Will felt his mood brightening, it was refreshing to speak to someone he actually liked. "I'm a *special investigator.*" He said sarcastically.

"Still?" She seemed more pissed than Will at the situation.

"Strict screening procedures."

Katz hummed in agreement. "Detects instability." She smiled and nodded at him. "Still unstable?"

Will didn't have a chance to reply before Jack walked in and spoke.

"You're not supposed to be in here." Beverly ignored the comment again.

She explained whatever she had found to Jack. Will blocked the sound out, watching the room as Price and Zeller followed in behind Crawford. They both give him a look of acknowledgement - Price even tried to smile at Will, although he quickly looked back to Beverly after getting nothing but a cold stare past his shoulder.

Will spotted the cat wander into the room, so he moved from where he stood by the window, to pick up the small animal.

Jack had clearly lost any care he had as he didn't say anything about it. He just turned to Will and asked, "Was this his golden ticket?"

Obviously not. There's nothing special about her compared to the others. Was what he didn't say. Instead, going with, "No, no. This is an apology." He said it as if it was the most obvious thing on earth.

Will turned back to look out the window, his hand idly scratching the ears of the purring cat.

The team looked at him in a mixture of confusion and worry. Zeller broke the silence in a hushed whisper. "Still a crazy cat guy?" He must've meant to whisper the comment to either Price or Katz.

Will whipped his body around to face the team. "Still no upper lip?"

He wasn't quite sure what possessed him to say such a thing about Brian's appearance. His comment just felt too familiar, like the feeling of knowing the kids behind you in class are whispering about you.

Katz and Price burst out into a fit of laughter, both pointing at Zeller's face and agreeing with Will. Jack however, looked less impressed about the whole situation.

Brian tilted his head. "I once saw you chase a bottle of aspirin with a shot of vodka."

"I had a headache." Will smiled smugly as he scratched under the cat's chin. "Now, if you'll excuse me." He turned to leave without looking at the group's reactions. "I'm going home."

Beverly patted a hand to his shoulder before he walked through the door. "Good to have you back, Will."

Will hummed and nodded in acknowledgment.

He heard Jack shout something to him as he left. Possibly something about writing up a report. Either way, Will was off the clock until he was back in Wolftrap.

The three hour flight from Minnesota back to Virginia was as rough as expected. Will didn't sleep. Instead, he dry-swallowed three aspirin and silently prayed that the crawling headache he was experiencing was just travel sickness.

Unfortunately for him, the pain continues to stick with him during the drive back to Wolftrap. Although, a distraction offered to dull the ache for a moment as Will spotted something on the barren, dark road.

A tattered dog ran alongside Will's car. He didn't need to think twice before his goal went from getting home, to getting this animal in his car. He'd never considered taking care of a

dog of his own. There'd been a few found in the woods and on desolate roads, but they'd all ended up being missing dogs - so Will never exactly had the chance.

After pulling over to block the road, and 15 minutes of on and off waiting, Will sat alongside the mangy animal in the trunk of his car. He watched as it ate some cat food, as if it hadn't been fed in days. There was a frayed rope tightly wrapped to the dog's neck, as if it had escaped from being tied up. Will knew from this alone that the animal would be skittish and very easily scared, so he took it slow, waiting until the dog had calmed into an almost slumber before driving off.

It had to have been almost midnight when Will finally arrived home. (So much for keeping that sleep schedule.) And even then, instead of going to sleep, he focused on his new friend.

The cats gathered around to watch as this new, strange animal was washed by the man who fed them. The majority of them left after a while, seemingly getting bored and not caring about this new addition. The others were just curious, or just liked being close to Will.

To the few that stayed, Will decided he'd introduce them now. He took a sip of the glass of whiskey he had on the go. "Winston, this is everybody." The cats' ears perked up at the sudden sound of his voice. "Everybody, this is Winston."

He sat down into the wooden chair behind him, watching as some braver animals got closer to investigate. One of the cats arched their back in aggression, however quickly stopped after Will clicked his tongue against the side of his mouth. "Now, play nice." He said to no one in particular.

After the distraction of the new addition had left him, Will laid out of breath in his bed. He wasn't sure what the nightmare he'd just woken up from was about. All that he could remember was the cold face of Elise Nichols in her own bed. And now a moat of sweat surrounded his sheats.

Luckily, there were two towels on standby for these situations. One was used as a temporary sheat, the other as a cover. Will yanked his damp shirt over his torso, leaving him only in his white underwear, yet still, the room felt as though someone had lit a fire under his bed.

-Espoir-

Will splashed the water from the sink into his face. It was as if he hadn't fully woken up yet, but was somehow in the bathroom of the FBI academy. He couldn't exactly recall driving here, but just knew that he did - otherwise, how would he be here?

If the cold water against his boiling skin didn't jolt him up, the yell of Jack Crawford's somehow already-annoyed voice did.

“What are you doing in here?”

Jack asked the question as if the answers weren’t written on the tiled walls around them.

“I enjoy the smell of urinal cake.” Will wiped the droplets from his hands with a paper towel.

“Me too, we need to talk.” Jack answered quickly before someone walked. He turned to look at them. “Use the ladies’ room!” His voice echoed off the barren walls.

Will acted as if this was the most normal thing in the world - *your boss chasing you into a public toilet, then yelling at anyone else who dared come in those public toilets.*

Jack started again. “No report on my desk. Well, not from you at least.”

Will stared down at the floor. “Yeah. Didn’t exactly get a chance to write one up after the quick 6 hour journey I had to make in the evening.”

“Well, luckily you can just tell me everything now. Look- Will. You’re in the saddle?” *One of those stupid questions you weren’t supposed to answer.*

“I’m in the saddle. Just not-” Will’s hands twitched and fluttered at his sides. “Just not sure which way I’m pointing.” He watched as Jack blatantly rolled his eyes in front of him. “I don’t know this psychopath, never dealt with him- I don’t even *know* if he’s a psychopath. He’s not insensitive, he’s not shallow.”

Jack started to speak before Will had finished his last syllable. “You know something. Otherwise you wouldn’t have called it an apology.”

Their back and forth bickering about the case got nowhere as it continued, only rising when Jack shouted, “*What kind of crazy is he?*”

The shakiness of Will’s body worsened as they argued. Jack wouldn’t listen, no matter how much he spoke, they just kept ending back in the same loop - the same circle. *Same finish, same start.*

Will only realised his shift in mindset when his anger grew at Jack’s suggestion that the killer would’ve raped the girl. He raised his voice finally, matching the other man’s tone. “That’s not how he’s loving them - *he* wouldn’t disrespect them that way.” Will’s words changed from first to third person as he dipped back out of this killer’s mind. Still, the anger simmered quietly. “He kills the girls quickly- and… to his thinking, with mercy.”

Will turned back to face the sink, away from Jack. He heard the man say another few words - probably just thoughts out loud. He was only brought back to his surroundings by the tap of footsteps leaving.

Jack spoke once again before leaving Will alone. “Katz found something on the corpse that may give us a lead. You’re friendly with her, I’m sure she won’t mind if you go check it out for yourself.”

His words were infantilizing, it frustrated Will the way he was sure it was supposed to. And again, the suggestion seemed less like a request and more like an order, so off to the lab Will went.

"-I mean, come *on* Brian, don't you believe just a little bit?" Beverly was arguing with Brian Zeller as Will walked into the lab.

"How on earth would I believe just a little bit? You either do or don't." They spoke to each other as if there wasn't a dead girl lying next to them, even Jimmy Price stood smiling in amusement as he watched.

The sight of the three interacting like usual humans should instantly lifted Will's mood, he too could understand how they could all easily forget the setting around them.

Beverly turned to Will after noticing his presence in the room. "Ah Will, we need an unbiased opinion here."

Zeller sighed. "Bev- there's no point in this, it's opinion not fact. However, if we're going by-" He began to argue again.

Beverly quickly shushed him. "Yeah, yeah. Whatever." She waved him off, looking back to Will. "Brian says there's no such thing as fate, or true love. Tell him he's wrong."

Will nearly laughed, however he thought about Beverly's question for a moment. "I'm not sure. I guess I believe that everything happens for a reason or something? I don't know."

Both Katz and Zeller sighed, shaking their heads in unison. Price was next to speak up. "Well technically, he believes in fate then? Right Will?"

This conversation was much more interesting than whatever Will had originally come down to discuss, so he decided to entertain them for a moment. "Yeah, I think so. But I don't know about true love, that's a bit juvenile, don't you think?"

Beverly's eyebrows dipped in disagreement. "What, no. C'mon Graham, a pretty face like yours must have a lady back at home with all those cats. You don't believe she's your true love?"

Will's expression didn't change, he wasn't offended by any assumptions people had about him. This assumption had to be the least harmful one yet in his books. "No, no. Don't think I've ever even had a girlfriend. I guess nobody's quite matched up to my standards yet." He added the last comment in with a smile, hoping to draw away from the first, more depressing one.

The three agents looked at him in surprise. "God, Graham, really? Nobody's tried to get a piece of that." Jimmy waved his finger in a circle towards Will. "I mean, I'm free on Friday night if you are."

Will ignored Jimmy's attempt, instead casting his mind back to the thought of true love. *Had there been anyone in his life that stuck out? Or was he yet to meet this mystery lover?* A flash of a well-defined face suddenly unveiled itself in Will's brain.

He shrugged. "There was this person in uni. We got along well. Who knows, maybe I missed my chance with my true love." He tried to sound too sad when he said it.

Beverly cast him a surprised smile. "You went to England for uni, right? I don't remember you mentioning a lucky little London lady to me."

"Lithuania. They were from Lithuania." Will said, his face half-absent as he thought back to those years.

"Imagine that. Will Graham got it on with a minxy European girl in his youth." Beverly laughed.

Will pushed his glasses back up his nose and shook his head. "Nothing like that, no. Nothing ever happened between us."

"No way, we have got to find-"

Beverly's soon-to-be-tangent was cut short by Brian Zeller. "As much as I would love to hear about Romeo's tragic teenage love affair. I've just remembered there's a corpse in front of us."

Beverly clicked her tongue in annoyance. "But I was just-"

Will interrupted this time. "I have to agree with Zeller. Jack's already in a mood, he sent me down here to look at a body, so unfortunately, I have to look at a body."

"When is he not in a mood…" Price muttered to no one in particular.

Katz laughed quietly, turning around to the steel table in the middle of the room.

Will watched from a few paces back as the team of three chatted about the state of the body. Price was talking about prints or something, Beverly asked a question, Zeller answered.

He had tuned himself to only listen in on things his mind - *or more likely the killer's mind* - found interesting or important.

Beverly defended herself against something that Zeller said. "Her body has piercings that look like they were caused by deer antlers. I didn't say the deer was responsible for putting them there."

Will's words kicked in faster than his brain could. "She was mounted on them," He said blankly. The group turned to him with that usual confused-creeped-out look. "--like hooks." Will stared expressionlessly at the corpse as he spoke, his eyes fluttered frantically around her body. "She may've been bled." He suggested.

The team chose not to respond to Will's eerie words, instead looking back to the body.

Zeller dug his hands into her open torso. “See that?” He was talking to Price. “Took it out, stitched it back in.”

Jimmy looked less disgusted and more confused at the discovery. “Huh. Why would someone take it out just to take the time to stitch it back in- so precariously as well.”

“There’s something wrong with the meat.” Once again, the three looked back at Will with their usual expression at his strange choice of wording. Although, it was quickly explained why he’d chosen to say such a thing. Will swallowed, his adams apple bobbing in his throat.

Zeller looked back to Will, his gloved hands still deep in the girl’s organs. “She has liver cancer.” He looked surprised.

The theory that had loomed in the back of Will’s mind ever since seeing the corpse reappear was finally confirmed. “Yeah, he's- he’s eating them.” Will nodded and smiled sympathetically to himself, feeling uncomfortable at the abilities of his own gift of empathy.

It would seem the rest of the people in the room felt the same way, as the air stayed silent for another minute.

Beverly nodded her head blankly. “I’ll call Jack, get him down here to give him a rundown.” She peeled the blue gloves from her hands and reached for a phone on the desk Will leaned on. The other three watched as she made the call, saying a few words before hanging up. “He’s busy or something-” She turned to Will. “It’s your lucky day though, he’s asked to see you in his office.”

Will pushed off of the desk, deciding not to fight against whatever he was about to be put up against. He hummed a small noise of acknowledgement. “I’ll do my best to get him down here when we’re done. No promises though.”

Everyone nodded. Brian had taken his hands out of the body and was now doing his best to take off the soaked gloves. “Goodluck on… whatever Jack’s about to make you do.” He did his best to smile at Will.

“Probably the same old paperwork. But thanks.” Was all Will had to offer before he left the lab in a hurry.

Jack opened the door to his office, stepping aside to let Will in. “Will, there’s someone I’d like you to meet. He’s going to be working on a psychological profile of our killer.”

It was only as Jack said that, that Will noticed the other person in the room with them. A man sat, back faced to Will, opposite Jack’s desk. He was signing something, possibly paperwork about the case, and had a cup of coffee in one hand. He had short, dirty-blonde hair and was wearing a light brown blazer.

Jack moved to the cork board on the wall of his office, inspecting the strings and photographs once again before turning back to Will. “This is Doctor Lecter, he’ll be working alongside

you for the majority of the case."

That name rang a surge of familiarity through Will's body. He'd heard it somewhere before, or perhaps he'd seen it written down somewhere - either way, it felt ever so familiar. *Probably just one of the impotent bastards that treated me at one point.* He convinced himself.

The mystery Doctor in the chair stood up, back still facing Will. He clicked the pen and placed it with a stack of paper onto Jack's desk. "Thank you Jack," He begun.

He might've said something else after those three words, however Will's senses decided to shut off as soon as that voice hit his ears. That smooth, foreign accent. The deep, polite tone. *It couldn't be.*

The man turned to face Will. He only turned his head first - his body still facing away from the shorter man. The Doctor glanced at Will, then back to his coffee to take a sip, however he changed his course of action to give a double take. This time, his entire body followed as he looked back at Will, and it seemed as if everything stopped. The tick of various clocks became silent. The hum of the air-con disappeared.

There, in front of Will, stood Hannibal. It was a name that hadn't rung through his head in years.

Reflexes Will didn't even know existed kicked in, forcing him to slowly walk towards the other man. Their eyes locked, scared that if they parted again, it may actually be the last time.

A loud, muffled voice came from the side of the room, and Will was suddenly reminded of the other presence. He panicked, his eyes widening as his gaze stayed on Hannibal. "It's nice to- to meet you. *Doctor.*" Will forced his expression back to stern.

Hannibal seemed to pick up on whatever Will was going for, so he met him with a hand, holding it out for the other man to shake. "Pleasure to meet you too… *Detective*, is it?" Their hands stayed intertwined for a millisecond longer than what could be considered 'just a handshake' although Jack probably wasn't looking too closely.

"Special Agent. Haven't quite made it past the screening process yet." Will's gaze trailed from Hannibal's eyes to the rest of him. Taking in his beautifully aged face, to his lightened hair and familiar dress sense.

Hannibal smirked and tilted his head. "Too unstable?"

You know me too well. Is what Will wanted to reply with. However, he wasn't quite sure how Jack would react to that, so he decided to go for his usual snarky remark instead. "What gave it away?"

They stood, Hannibal beside Jack's desk and Will in the middle of the room, both looking at each other in silence for a moment. Will regrettably broke this moment by moving to sit down, next to the chair that Hannibal had previously been sitting in.

Hannibal didn't take a seat next to him, instead he walked over to where Crawford stood, inspecting the evidence board.

It gave Will a chance to think, to take in everything that had just happened in such a short amount of time.

He wished with every part of his body that this wasn't one of his horrific nightmares. Although, he also wasn't sure if he would rather it be real or not. *Yes,* Hannibal was back, however, what that meant for Will was undecided.

He took in Hannibal's looks from just now, comparing it to what his mind could remember from 18 years ago. The older man's hair had lightened, along with being cut into a more professional and modern style. The effects of time had treated his face well, ageing it like a fine wine, changed but deliciously.

Will's mind suddenly cast him back to the last time they'd spoken. The pity he'd felt for himself that night, praying, alone in his bed, that everything would change for him. That Hannibal would cancel his flight - his future, just for Will.

Will thought about the old polaroids that still remained in his house, shoved in between old books on his shelf. He thought about that final letter, and the plane ticket. How they were also kept on his shelf, flattened and lost against other random old papers.

I wonder if he still thinks I'm attractive. Will thought as he remembered the compliments Hannibal would constantly shower him in. Although, he nearly grimaced at himself for thinking such a thing.

Instead, he cast his mind back to 15 minutes ago, when he was talking with Beverly. *Had this been what she was arguing about? Fate?*

"-then Freddie Lounds posted it on Tattlecrime.com."

Will's attention shifted to the conversation happening around him at the mention of those two things. Jack was sitting in front of him, behind his desk and Hannibal was moving to take the seat next to Will.

"Tasteless." Will said, still looking down at the surface of the table.

"Do you have trouble with taste?" Hannibal's tone mirrored the smirked expression he wore.

"My thoughts are often not tasty." Will was sure he'd wake up from this strange dream any time now, so he didn't think too much about what he said.

Hannibal let out a breath as he sat down. "Nor mine, no effective barriers." He handed Will the cup of coffee he had been holding.

Will took the drink without thinking. "I build forts." He took a sip from the paper cup.

"Associations come quickly." Hannibal said, watching the younger man intently.

Will wasn't entirely sure what Hannibal was talking about, however he knew just to go along with it. "So do forts." He handed the coffee back to Hannibal, not even thinking about the interaction as it came so naturally.

Hannibal quickly switched the topic, expertly driving the attention onto Will. He wanted to hear as much as he could. "Not fond of eye contact, are you?"

Will sighed, clearly getting tired of the same observation that people made. "Eyes are distracting. So too much, don't see enough…" He intentionally made direct eye contact with Hannibal. "And- and, it's hard to focus when you're thinking, *Oh, those whites are really white,* or, he must have hepatitis- is that a burst vein?" Will looked Hannibal up and down. "So, yeah. I try to avoid eyes whenever possible." He turned to face the other man in the room. "Jack?-"

Hannibal expertly cut Will off, keeping the younger man's attention on himself. "I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present, yet shocked at your associations. Appalled at your dreams."

Will narrowed his eyes, suddenly feeling a sense of dread and abandonment. "Who's profile are you working on- Jack? Who's profile is he working on?" He jerked his head to face Crawford.

"Will-" Jack began, panic in his voice. "We need you back out in the field, we can't do that if you're not- you know."

Will nearly laughed. "Stable? C'mon Jack you can say it. Unstable would be a compliment at this point."

"Will, please- It'd be an hour a week, just with Doctor Lecter-"

"Please, don't psychoanalyse me. You won't like me when I'm psychoanalysed." He stood up and Jack opened his mouth to say something, only to be interrupted by Will again. "Now, if you'll excuse me. I have a class to teach - on psychoanalysing."

He stood up and began to leave the room, only coming to a halt just a few steps in and turning to face Hannibal. The other man was already looking at him. "Apologies for wasting your time, Doctor." He looked back to face the door, and walked out, not wanting to hear a reply to that.

Will strutted down the hallway outside of Jack's office, his fists clenched in annoyance at his Boss's surprise attack on him. He muttered curses about the whole situation under his breath, ignoring the looks from people who walked past him.

He took the half empty bottle of aspirin from inside his blazer pocket and quickly swallowed a few from his shaky hands.

Will flinched as the pressure of a hand engulfed his shoulder, coming to a halt as he whipped his head around.

“Will.” Spoke the accented voice of the person in front of him, Hannibal had chased him out of the office.

He wasn’t sure what to say, so instead stared blankly at Hannibal’s shirt collar. His fingers twitched anxiously around the object he was holding.

Will strangely found himself missing the warmth on his shoulder as the hand pulled away.

“I wanted to deeply apologise-” Will opened his mouth to speak, only to be stopped by Hannibal raising a finger at him. “I was told that you knew of my reasoning for being here. I did not know it would be a surprise.”

Will’s anger simmered down, his eyes softened, along with his shoulders relaxing. “It’s not your fault, I don’t blame you for doing your job.”

Hannibal nodded, then glanced down to the bottle in Will’s hand, frowning slightly as he realised what it was.

They looked at each other in silence for another few seconds, ignoring the agitated sighs of people as they stood in the middle of the hallway.

“It was good to see you again.” Hannibal said softly, his voice low as he nearly purred the words.

Will found himself smiling pitifully to himself, he looked from Hannibal’s chest and up to his eyes, being met with the morbidly beautiful red of the older man’s irises. He hummed a noise of agreement, biting the inner side of his lip. “Yeah.” Was all he could cough up. “I- um, I wasn’t lying about that lecture, I do actually have a class to teach.” He forced a laugh at his own awkwardness.

Hannibal offered a small smile. “Yes, of course. Wouldn’t want to keep your students waiting.”

Will clicked his tongue. “Guess I’ll- I’ll see you later then?” He shuffled his feet and gazed back down at Hannibal’s shirt.

Hannibal’s polite expression morphed into more of a grin, one that hadn’t graced Will in years. “Yes. I hope you will.”

Will nodded and turned around, checking his watch as he did so. He walked with quickness down the hallway, the sudden realisation that he’d been standing with Hannibal much longer than he realised.

Although, this didn’t stop him from turning around one last time, only to be met with the sight of the older man’s form, still standing - all stoic like - in the middle of the hallway, exactly where he’d left him.

Will quickly turned his head back in front of him, finding himself unable to stop the smile taking over his face.

A feeling that once felt so distant had returned to Will. One that had him feeling warm and calm. One that caused a pleasant rush of familiarity to wash over him, staining his skin in permanent ink.

Chapter End Notes

A day early AND longer chapter than usual. I'm actually spoiling people.

I'm so excited to write them in this setting, trust me, I HAVE A LOT PLANNED!!!!!

Also, please be patient with these two, you'll get something soon I swear.

My cat stared directly at me for the majority of me writing this, so I'm pretty sure he knows something that I don't - also - he would not stop trying to sit on my keyboard so I really apologise if there's an extra letter or something somewhere.

One last thing - If the majority of people REALLY hate the idea of Will having cats instead, I'll change it, however if it's just one or two comments it's staying the same.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

And so the routine began again, just like clockwork.

Spend the entire drive home over-analysing every small detail in all the conversations he had today, apologise to and feed the cats, (and the new addition of Winston), rethink every word that came out his mouth whilst trying to not fall asleep in the shower, and finally, try to figure out why all the tiredness of the day suddenly washes away as soon as his head meets his pillow.

This had been Will's routine on the last case he worked on, and was no doubt going to be the routine he followed with this case.

The two cases weren't all that different - teenage girls of a certain appearance going missing, then turning up dead a few days later, with parts of them missing. Nothing new to Will.

It was a strange thing to think about before going to bed, *dead teenagers*. Most people would end the day with the thought of a loved one, or a fond memory they'd like to relive for a while.

Will didn't have either of those. Although, he laid with the thought of a memory - a memory from just a few hours prior.

Will's heart still hadn't quite returned to the normal pace since the key event of today. It had begun to race as soon as he laid his eyes on Hannibal's face, and had only picked up from there. And when he'd turned, only to see the other man watching him from behind - Will truly thought he might go into cardiac arrest.

Hannibal had been just as beautiful as Will remembered. *He must be in his early forties now.* Will thought to himself, as he quickly added up the years. Hannibal was 44 now, and Will had to admit how graciously the years had treated him. He looked his age, but not in a bad way - in fact it was in a very good way.

Will on the other hand, knew very well that the effects of time hadn't treated him quite as graciously, actually, they hadn't treated him at all. It was as if they'd forgotten about him, leaving the dark circles and scruffs of facial hair to be the only things preventing him from being carded everytime he tried to stock up on his monthly supply of alcohol.

Speaking of, Will decided that the hours of the night were only going to get longer, the more he waited.

He threw his legs over the side of his bed, stopping to allow the rush of nausea to wipe over him from sitting up too quickly. The time on the clock read 1:43. Will thought this was

strange, seeing how he remembered getting into his bed at around eight, which in his mind, was less than half an hour ago.

He stood up, discarding the thought as he walked past the carpet of cats on his way to the kitchen. He'd probably just fallen asleep at some point without realising it.

Will reached into a cabinet below his counter, pulling out a half empty bottle of Jack Daniels before pouring a few fingers of it into a stray glass.

He leant against the counter, tilting his back in a sigh as he realised the nausea from a few minutes ago hadn't quite worn off. The pounding in his head hadn't been relieved either, only worsened.

With that, Will walked back over to his bed, glass still in hand. He lowered himself to the ground, taking care not to spill the drink as he reached to retrieve his blazer from yesterday. He fumbled around in the inner pockets of the jacket, only to finally retrieve the familiar bottle of aspirin.

His fingers frantically wrapped around the sealed lid before he poured two small tablets into his shaky hands. The painkillers were washed down with a sip of whiskey, assuring a smooth trip into his bloodstream.

Will screwed the cap back into the bottle, throwing it down into the expanding pile of clothes by the foot of his bed.

His stomach growled, and to that, Will took another swig of whiskey. The buzz of alcohol dulled the headache better than the aspirin. However, Will knew that carrying around a flask in his jacket was much less socially acceptable than a few pills. Even then, he was starting to get the idea that people wouldn't really bat an eye if it was him, in fact, it was sort of expected at this point.

With the quiet of the night, Will found his mind wandering back to the topic of Hannibal. He replayed their recent meeting over again in his brain, staring desolate at the wall as he did so.

In the spur of the moment, Will had decided to act as if they had never met each other before, and when Hannibal mirrored his choice to do so he had considered the option of the other man genuinely not remembering who he was. However, that theory was quickly proven wrong during their short conversation outside of Jack's office.

No. It wasn't then. It was before that.

Will played the moment over again.

Hannibal had handed Will his coffee. It was such a familiar motion that muscle memory had someone kicked in. They had shared many cups of coffee in their two years of friendship, so the action came naturally.

Hannibal would hand Will the paper cup, Will would take a sip before handing it back over to Hannibal, and so on. Will hadn't even noticed such a thing had happened until now. He was

now beginning to worry if anything else had slipped his mind in the moment. *Had Jack seen the small interaction take place?* He hoped not.

Jack had informed Will that Hannibal would be his new therapist - his own psychiatrist. Just an hour a week. No formal measures would be in place, they'd merely be having *conversations.* And well, Will would much rather have these conversations with someone he knew than a random Doctor who'd report his every word to Jack Crawford. The arrangement could work.

Will just had to hide the fact he once had a personal relationship with Lecter. He knew that the only reason he hadn't been referred to Alana Bloom was because they already knew each other, and of course the whole department assumed Will had some sort of teenage crush on her. Which was actually not the case, funnily enough.

Oh how Will would love to see the look on Jack's face if he ever realised he'd done the exact thing he'd tried to avoid - setting Will up with a psychiatrist who he found himself infatuated with.

For the first time in many years, Will found himself excited to speak to another person.

He wondered if Hannibal had changed in those two decades they had spent apart. The older man's accent was still obvious, but now had more of an American twinge to it. His pretentious dress sense hadn't changed much either, the suits only seemed to be seemingly more expensive now. And of course, the politeness of a gentleman had stayed with him through all those years, with Hannibal chasing Will down to apologise for something he had no involvement in.

It was only when a buzzing sound alerted Will back out of his mind that he realised he was smiling.

He took the last sip of whiskey from the glass and leaned over to the bedside table, where his phone was ringing.

Will glanced at the clock, trying to figure out at what ungodly hour was someone calling him. He replaced the empty glass with the phone and flicked it open, only to read the only name that would have courage to call him at two in the morning.

He stared blankly at the vibrating phone in his hand for a few seconds before finally answering.

"Will, jesus- finally." That familiar booming voice shouted over the call. "I've been trying to reach you for hours. Have you been out or something? Because I know damn well you're not a heavy sleeper."

"What?" Will asked, genuine confusion obvious in his tone. "This is the only time my phone's rang. What would I be doing out at two in the morning anyway?"

"Two in the-? Look Will, I don't have time for your games. A body's been found in Minnesota. I need your eyes on it, stat."

Will groaned. He'd given up in trying to hide his displeasure already. "Can't it wait until the morning? It's not like it'll go anywhere."

There was a pause on the other line. "Will, seriously? It's 6AM. You better feed those cats and get to the airport now if you don't want to miss the flight. We have a motel booked for you when you get to Minnesota, chances are you'll be there for a night or two."

Will didn't say anything. He simply let his eyes unfocus as they rested on a small crack in the wall.

The sound of Jack ending the call snapped him back into reality.

Will instantly whipped his head over to the clock. Jack wasn't lying, it really was six in the morning. But, just a few minutes ago that same clock had read '2:00'. How had he lost four hours of the morning?

Maybe his mind had just been playing tricks on him when he'd previously checked the time. The cloudiness of sleep still surrounded his head now.

Deciding not to dwell too much on the situation at hand, Will trudged to the bathroom, pulling his shirt over his head on the way as he tried to shake the stained feeling of sickness from himself.

He closed the bathroom door behind him, not wanting any company clawing at him whilst he tried to shower. Pulling the white underwear off himself, Will caught his own eye in the sink mirror. He stared at his own face for a few paces, finding himself running a hand over his facial hair. Hannibal had always complimented his clean-shaven face, with Will going out of his way to shave on days they considered 'special', like birthdays.

He contemplated plugging in the rusty electric razor from the cabinet. There wasn't even a sure chance that Hannibal would be in Minnesota, let alone their paths crossing.

Will shook his head at himself, a feeling of embarrassment waving over him at how he genuinely considered shaving his beard on the off-chance that his old friend might see it.

He turned the water of the shower on, cringing at the thought of other people's reactions. The forensic team would no doubt make it the biggest deal of the week, shifting the focus from a dead girl to Will's face. Which sounded worse than any of his nightmares.

-Espoir-

The mid-morning sun of Minnesota strained Will's eyes as he stared vacantly at the stag head in front of him.

He answered Jack's questions with his normal numb tone, as well as trying to drown out the sound of Jimmy Price chatting on about the meaning of some bird.

As Will got closer, he noticed something unique about this scene. The picture was different, by an artist he hadn't seen before. Whoever killed those girls hadn't painted this piece. It was a copycat, someone creating their own imitation of an artist, only unable to stray away from their own style.

He found his mind intertwining with Elise Nicohls' killer, and as he suspected, this was not his design.

Still with one foot in this cannibal's doorway, Will spoke to Jack, giving him a rundown of everything he knew so far.

"He has a daughter- same age as the other girls. Same eye colour, same hair colour, same height, same weight. She's an only child." A wave of sudden sadness washed over him. "She's leaving home. He can't stand to see her go."

With Will finishing what he needed to say, he swiftly turned and started to walk away from the scene.

Jack was quick to put his hurried leave to a stop with another question. "What about this copycat?" He was referring to the killer of the body infront of them.

Will had a hint of annoyance in his tone, not caring to show his displeasure of being here. "An intelligent psychopath, particularly a sadist - like this guy - can be very hard to catch."

Will realised he was already digging his own grave before he could stop himself from speaking. Telling Jack just how hard this killer would be to catch would only draw Will closer to the case. He sighed, realising that he'd have to finish what he'd started. "No traceable motives, there will be no patterns- he may never kill this way again." Jack looked at Will as if he was expecting more, and this only fed into the building annoyance. "Why don't you have Dr Lecter draw up a psychological profile. You seemed *very* impressed with his opinion."

Will managed to trudge through the long grass of the field quickly enough that he didn't have to hear whatever argument Jack had to that.

The comment wasn't about Hannibal himself, instead, only at Jack for throwing a surprise therapy session at Will.

He found Beverly Katz waiting by the plethora of cars parked by the edge of the field. She was leant against the door of one of the cars, distracted by something on her phone. Her attention quickly shifted from the device and over to Will as soon as she heard footsteps on the crunchy gravel.

She offered him a smile, and began to walk over to meet him. "Managed to get away from Crawford already?"

Will nodded and shoved his hands in his jacket pocket. It was a habit he'd never been able to shake - aggressively shoving his hands into the finishing coat. He was surprised the lining of it hadn't frayed yet, especially with it being almost two decades old. However, the brand had probably been some sort of special, expensive kind, meant for years and years of use. Will had never checked where the piece of clothing originally came from - the writing on the inside tag had long been rubbed up - but judging from the person it came from, it was most definitely the best one on the market.

"I simply walked away and he didn't chase me, so I took it as a sign. What about you - Price and Zeller too busy arguing to notice you slip away?"

Beverly laughed, shaking her head as she smiled. "No, actually. All I had to do was take some pictures. And well, if you've seen my camera roll, you'll know I'm quite the expert already."

"You're into photography?" Will didn't ever make an effort to converse like this, but he always tried with Beverly.

"Well, not exactly. I have a bearded dragon back at home who's just especially photogenic."

With the mention of animals, Will's sarcastic expression quickly disappeared. "Oh? What's its name?"

"Here-" Beverly unlocked her phone and opened the photos app. "His name is Edgar - after Allan Poe, of course."

Will nodded in agreement. "Because who else would you name a lizard after."

"Exactly!" She scrolled through some pictures of documents to show Will a photo of Edgar. He had a pair of paper sunglasses - clearly made by Beverly in a matter of seconds - and was posed next to a plant that vaguely resembled a palm tree.

"And Edgar is… okay with this?" Will said, unsure of how to phrase it.

"Oh he's *more* than okay with it. Sometimes I'm pretty sure he likes getting all dressed up for a photoshoot." She turned off her phone and slipped it into the pocket of her leather jacket. "Anyway, where are you off to now, Graham?"

"Well, I had someone write down the address for the motel for me, so I was probably just going to head there. I've been going to sleep earlier to try and fix my schedule." Will shrugged.

Beverly looked up to the darkening sky, then back to Will. "What's the address?" Will dug the crumpled note out his jacket and handed it to her. Beverly nodded and smiled hopefully. "Yep, same one as usual. I could drive you there if you want?"

Will nodded. "As usual?" He questioned.

Beverly began to walk over to the car she'd previously been leaning on. "Whenever we get sent up to Minnesota to help out in the labs, they just chuck us in the same shitty motel." She

clicked the keys from her pocket and opened the driver's door.

Will followed, climbing inside next to her. He hummed in acknowledgement.

The car started up, Will leaned his head on the window, watching the fields of Minnesota stretch further and further ahead.

Beverly breathed in quickly, as if she'd just remembered something important. "I forgot to ask, what did Jack want with you? When he came down to the lab later that day he was all pissed at something."

Will sighed, rolling his eyes as he remembered the incident. "He wanted to surprise me with a psychiatrist."

"Which one was it? Bloom? Or did he convince Chilton to step foot in his office somehow?" Beverley smiled at her own sarcastic comment.

"No, someone else. Jack called him Doctor Lecter?" Will acted as if the name didn't leave a stain of familiarity on the tip of his tongue. He looked over to watch his friend's reaction.

Her smile widening, Beverly groaned. "Lecter? God, Jimmy calls him Doctor dreamy." Will forced out a laugh, desperately trying to act in an ordinary manner. "You're lucky, Will. The things I would do to have someone *force* me to spend an hour with that man every week."

"Is he famous over with you guys or something?" Will said, genuinely intrigued by Hannibal's popularity.

"Mm, yeah, that's probably the best way of putting it. Jack's brought him in a few times to work on profiles. We saw a lot of him whilst you were away."

Will hummed, looking back to face the road ahead. "He seemed like a nice enough guy. Chased me down to apologise and everything."

Beverly scoffed. "Lecter chased you?"

"Well, he managed to catch up to me fast enough. Then proceed to tell me that he had no clue it'd be a surprise for me. Apparently Jack had told him that I had already agreed or something."

"Everyone who knows Lecter says he's a decent person. Alana's pretty friendly with him or something."

Thoughts of Alana Bloom and Hannibal flashed through Will's mind. He made up images of them together. Alana was especially known for her beauty in the FBI, so Will couldn't exactly blame Hannibal for getting *too friendly* with her. She was a psychiatrist as well, so it wasn't like they had nothing in common. Will decided to test the waters.

"Her and Lecter got something going on then?" His heart nearly stopped in anticipation.

“Well, that’s what everyone thought, until Alana herself shut those rumours down.” Will nearly sighed in relief. “Apparently Lecter’s married, which I’m not sure why nobody considered that possibility in the first place.” Will was sure he was about to have both a stroke and a heart attack.

“Have you ever met the wife?” He had to focus on his voice not shaking as he asked the question.

Beverly answered casually. “Nope, but apparently she’s a looker, which is no surprise. Alana saw a picture of her in Lecter’s wallet once - brown hair, blue eyes - standard pretty girl.”

Will answered with a short hum, not bothering with words.

The motel they arrived at was as average as it came. Nothing special to it, just the same old horror-movie-esc building you’d expect it to be.

Will thanked Beverly for driving him and went off to his room. The long drive from the crime scene had plagued the sky with darkness, so Will quickly stripped off to take a well-deserved shower before preparing himself for whatever tonight’s sleep held for him.

He always had difficulty sleeping anywhere but his own house. The comfort of his animals’ presence was always something he took for granted - never realising what they brought until he was away from them. Still, Will eventually falls asleep. He isn’t sure when or for how long, just that the usual nightmares tormented him in those few hours away from the world.

Will is abruptly awoken after releasing the knocks he can hear are not part of his dream. He swings his legs over the side of the bed, pulling back the covers in an attempt to cover the sweat stain he’s managed to create.

The off-white clock on the wall pointed to half-ten, which was strange, since Jack didn’t need him out until another two hours.

Still clad in just a shirt and white underwear, Will trudged over to the door. His eyes slowly adjusted to the bright light of the outside as he pulled it open.

“Goodmorning, Will.” Hannibal watched as the man in front of him checked behind him before answering, possibly checking to see if they were alone. Hannibal used this moment of distraction to glance down at Will’s sleepwear. Seemingly, it hadn’t changed at all over the years.

Will reverted his attention back to Hannibal. “Where’s Crawford?” He asked. Jack was supposed to meet him in a few hours to check out some sort of construction site.

Hannibal smiled. “Deposed in court. The adventure will be yours and mine today.” He’d met with Jack Crawford some hours prior. Jack had mentioned how he wouldn’t be able to accompany Will to their next stop, and that he’d call Alana Bloom up to go in his place.

Thankfully, Hannibal had been in the right place at the right time, and swiftly offered to go instead since he was already in Minnesota.

Hannibal glanced around the dark room behind Will. “May I come in?” He asked playfully.

Will nodded and walked back into the darkness. Hannibal took the hint, walking in and closing the door behind him. He heard a rattle of pills from Will as he stood over a nightstand. Deciding not to say anything, the older man began to set out the contents of his bag onto the small table next to the door as he sat himself down.

He heard the fumbling of a zip, only to look over to see Will pulling on a pair of jeans. Their eyes met briefly as Will noticed the staring, to which he quickly buttoned the piece of clothing and hurriedly made his way over to the table.

Wil lowered himself into the chair opposite Hannibal, leaning back into it. “You brought me breakfast?”

“For old time’s sake, as people say.” He set out the food and handed Will a plate with a decanter of coffee. “A little protein scramble to start the day.”

Will smirked to himself, gazing at Hannibal’s face as the man was distracted with setting up the meal. “I remember you making the exact thing whenever we had hangovers.”

Hannibal nodded. “I suspect working for Jack Crawford would give someone a similar headache.” He said seriously.

Will sucked his teeth in an attempt to force down a laugh. “Don’t I know that all too well.” He picked up a fork that Hannibal had supplied him with and started to eat from the small bowl. He hummed in pleasure. “It’s delicious, as always. Thank you.”

Hannibal watched the younger man eat his first few bites. “My pleasure.” He ate a forkful from his own dish. “I’d like to apologise again for my analytical ambush. Although, I’m sure you’ve heard enough apologies as of late. So I have to consider using my apologies sparingly.”

“I think we should stick to just keeping it professional.” Will answered quickly.

Hannibal paused, staring at Will’s features for a short moment. “Or we could socialise like adults. God forbid we become friendly again.”

Will was starting to find himself getting annoyed at the avoidance of the elephant in the room. Surely Hannibal should be annoyed at Will right now. Their last meeting had ended like a bad breakup. Yet, here they were now, talking like nothing had ever happened. In those eighteen years, Will had made no effort to ever find Hannibal again, under the assumption that he’d never want to see Will’s face again.

He nearly rolled his eyes at Hannibal’s comment. “I don’t find you that interesting anymore.” Will forced the words out of his mouth. It wasn’t all that of a lie. To Will, Hannibal was just

another psychiatrist he was being forced to share all his problems with. Just another paid person who'd have to judge whether he deserved to be sent to the loony bin again.

To Will's surprise, Hannibal smirked. "You will." He said confidently.

They ate in silence for a few minutes, until the quietness was broken by Hannibal's rich, accented voice. "Agent Crawford has informed me of your past endeavours within the FBI. I'm told you have a knack for the monsters."

Will set his cutlery down and pushed his half-eaten dish away from himself. He leaned forward, closer to Hannibal, as if there was someone in the room whom he didn't want hearing this conversation. "I don't think the shrike killed that girl in the field." He said quietly. It felt comfortable rolling off his tongue when he spoke to Hannibal. Others would look at Will and wonder how they let him out of the hospital whenever he opened his mouth. Hannibal simply wanted to listen.

Hannibal mirrored Will's actions, pushing away his food and leaning in closer. "The devil is in the details." He sounded almost happy. "What didn't your copycat do to the girl in the field, what gave it away?"

Will answered quickly. "Everything." He rubbed his hands over his face in frustration. "That crime scene was practically gift wrapped."

"And who did our copycat intend this gift to be for?"

Will paused for a moment. He knew the answer, it wasn't as if he had to think. "*Me.*" He half-whispered.

Hannibal nodded. "Now all that is left is to figure out who sent you this gift, Will."

Will sighed. "Easier said than done." He murmured.

"Let's focus on the current problem at hand - this shrike fellow, what kind of problems does he have?"

"He has a few." Will managed to laugh out before pouring coffee into a mug.

"Do you ever have any problems, Will?"

Will found himself smiling. "Me? No." He said sarcastically.

"Of course you don't, I should know that much already. You and I are just alike - problem free." Hannibal watched intently as Will started to eat again. "You know Will, I think uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup. His finest china, used for only special guests."

Will leaned back into his chair as he began to laugh. He'd felt a similar happiness a few times when with agent Katz, but not such a kind like this. His laughter, combined with Hannibal's, felt nostalgic. In a more serious tone, he said, "How do you see me?"

Hannibal's expression softened. "As always, the mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by."

Will rubbed his palms over the arms of his chair. He looked down at his own thighs. "I see you haven't changed much. Still much of a romantic as ever." He said, a smile still present on his tired face.

Hannibal tilted his head playfully. "Only for you, of course. Officer."

Before Will could think of his own reply to that, his mind was cast back to the conversation he shared with Beverely yesterday evening. Hannibal was a married man. Whatever *situation* they had eighteen years ago was gone now. Will knew there was always a small chance that Hannibal had shared the same feelings for him, but now that chance was gone.

"I'm not an officer anymore, remember." He reached for the coffee Hannibal had supplied, but suddenly remembered the incident yesterday involving Hannibal and coffee, so there was a small notion of hesitation.

"I don't remember you being an officer when that nickname was first put in place."

Will sighed a breath of amusement out of his nose.

The rest of their morning in the motel was spent with Will idly pushing around the food in his bowl, and Hannibal attempting to start conversations with him. From Will's short, agitated answers, Hannibal learnt that the younger man lived alone with at least three cats, (perhaps more), and that he currently resided in Wolftrap, Virginia.

Eventually, they left in Hannibal's car to drive to their next stop. It came as no surprise to Will when he was led to a black Bentley as his ride. It was similar to the Rolls Royce that he'd remembered - similar colours, similar interior. Hannibal clearly had a certain taste.

-Espoir-

"What are you smiling at?" Will asks as they pull into the construction site.

Hannibal looks around at their setting. "Peeking behind the curtain. I've always been curious as to how the FBI goes about its business, when it's not kicking in doors."

Will breathed heavily out through his nose. "Well, the last two times I kicked in a door, I was stabbed."

"Both times?" Hannibal asked curiously.

"*Both times.*" Will grimaced. He gave Hannibal the rundown of what they were doing there.

“What did you say your names were?” The receptionist asked as Will and Hannibal shamelessly shuffled through the filing cabinet.

They both ignored her question, with Will instead asking a question as he opened another file. “Garrett Jacob Hobbs?” He read the name from the suspicious paper.

The woman answered his questions rudely, with short and quick sentences along with rolling her eyes when Will wasn’t looking. Hannibal watched closely as Will struggled to get a coherent answer out of her. A simple, *’no, yes, I don’t know,’* would suffice for his questions, but instead she was deciding to make the job a lot harder than it had to be. She was rude.

When loading the files into Hannibal’s car, he took the job of passing the boxes down to the receptionist. He had to hold back a grin as he watched the papers slide off the top of the box and onto her head. Will, the sweet thing, apologised quickly to her and picked up the fallen documents.

-Espoir-

They sat parked outside the Hobbs’ household for a few moments. Will had yet to get out of the car, so Hannibal followed suit.

He took this time to take in the younger man next to him. Will’s eyes were focused ahead, possibly with his mind somewhere else for the time being.

Will’s hair was much shorter than it had once been, along with a new addition of glasses. Hannibal couldn’t remember him having any problems with sight, so it was safe to assume he used them more as a social barrier. His face was barely tainted by age, the only thing making look remotely older was the scruff of facial covering his jaw.

Hannibal glanced down at the off-white button up that Will wore. There were pockets on each side of his chest - thick fabric that covered the sensitive parts of him. He wondered if Will still had in those hidden piercings he’d so confidently shown off. Ever since that day, every fantasy of Will that Hannibal had recorded on the screens of his mind palace had included tugging on those small metal bars and watching the smaller man whine and come undone at the small action.

Will was still relatively slim, however it would seem he still had some muscle from his time in the police force.

Hannibal watched as Will’s mind returned to the present as he let himself out of the car. Hannibal was close to follow.

He monetarily considered warning Will about the horrors he was about to see, however, he couldn’t ruin all the fun just yet. Doing so would reveal Hannibal’s true identity - and why

would he do that so soon? The good part would be watching Will put all the pieces together.

It all happened like clockwork. The screams of Mrs Hobbs alerted Will to the door, where he ran over in an attempt to save her. Hannibal watched from where he stood by the car. He felt almost bad for the collateral, but unfortunately, certain measures had to be taken for Hannibal's goal. Garrett Jacob Hobbs had to go. *He couldn't have Will's focus another now, could he?*

He followed Will into the house, stopping briefly to inspect the cooling body of Mrs Hobbs. As Hannibal walked into the kitchen, he was met with an ever so beautiful sight. Will moved with grace as he knelt beside the dying teenage girl. His lean forearms were covered in a warm layer of crimson.

His breath was shaky and rapid, as well as his hands. Seeing this distress, Hannibal decided it was time for him to intervene. He dropped to one knee, dirting his slacks with the girl's blood. Neither of them said a word to each other as Hannibal replaced Will's hands with his, covering the wound on her neck expertly.

"Please." Hannibal heard Will whisper beside him. He barely heard the word over the gasping breaths of Hobbs' daughter. "Please save her."

Hannibal glanced over to Will. "Will, I need you to call Jack Crawford. Tell him exactly what happened."

Will's breath was still shaky as he gasped desperately for air. "Yeah- I'll call- I'll call Jack…"

It was only as Will reached into his pocket to retrieve his phone, that Hannibal realised the watch that wrapped around his wrist. It was the exact one he'd bought for Will as a birthday gift. The gold accents around the hands caught glints of light from the open window. Hannibal almost forgets to keep pressure on the girl's wound as he adds another detail to the fantasies on display in his mind palace.

Will clearly feels some sort of attachment to this girl, especially after dipping into the mind of her father, then killing him in front of her. So when the ambulance arrives to take Abigail Hobbs away, Hannibal sees it in his best interest to accompany the girl. If Will takes notice of this, perhaps it'll bring their bond closer once again.

Even when arriving at the hospital, he stays with her. When she's out and into a recovery room, Hannibal doesn't leave her side. He makes an effort to fall asleep whilst clutching her hand. Thankfully, dreams of Will Graham and his blood covered forearms are there to lull him to sleep.

He doesn't bother to change out of his stained clothes, wanting Will to notice his bloody knees and red stains on the cuffs of his sleeves.

Everything is done with a purpose. Every small detail has a reason behind it. It's all planned out, wrapped specially for Will.

-Espoir-

Will's dreams are plagued with a new disease tonight. The mutilated corpse of Garret Jacob Hobbs joined him on his adventures. The eight shots that were fired into his body echoed around his mind.

Fortunately, he was pulled away from the coarse blanket of sleep by a series of knocks on a door. "Come in." He yelled as an instinct.

Will was in a hospital room. The unnatural light and sanitary smell gave that much away. His eyes adapted slowly to the white room, Hannibal sat opposite from him sleeping in a chair. His head was tilted his shoulder and his left hand was clutched tightly to the girl lying in the bed next to him. Will laid on a small couch pushed against the wall, his head was too heavy with sleep to lift.

Alana Bloom was the person who entered the room. She smiled at him as they made eye contact, then she quickly scanned the rest of the room before closing the door behind her.

"How are you, Will?" She made her way to stand at the foot of the hospital bed, just a few paces in front of Will.

"I have no idea." He tried his best to return the smile. Will then attempted to fight off the stabbing feeling in his head and sit up, only to be met with a brown suit jacket falling into his lap. "When did-" He murmured to himself.

"I see you've met Hannibal." She nodded to the jacket that was now in Will's clenched hands. "I had a feeling you two would get along."

"Oh yeah? Why's that?"

"Not sure. I figured you'd either hate him or love him."

"I'm not quite sure *love* is really the right term for it." Will said bitterly.

Alana let out a laugh. "You know what I meant." She looked over to Hannibal. "How long has he been there?"

Will shrugged. "He stayed with her all the way. Hasn't left her side once." He found himself smiling fondly at the older man. Thankfully, Alana was also focused on the sleeping man in the room.

Alana nodded. "Maybe he has a daughter of his own, or a niece or something. I'll have to ask later."

Will saw his opening and decided to shoot. "Isn't Lecter married? Perhaps she reminds him of his wife."

Alana nodded thoughtfully. She hummed in agreement. “Yes- I mean, I’ve only ever seen a glance of the lucky lady. But, she had dark brown hair and blue eyes, just like Abigail. I guess I’ve thought that Lecter’s been a little distant lately. But I mean, it all makes sense now. If he does have a daughter, chances are she’d match the profile of the missing girls.”

Will hadn’t even considered that not only might Hannibal be married, but he may have a family.

He recalled the conversation they shared yesterday morning. Eighteen years ago, Will would’ve considered the words spoken to be *flirting*. However, he was now starting to rethink every little sentence they’d ever said to each other. This whole time, maybe Hannibal hadn’t had any feelings for Will. That was how Hannibal treated all his friends. Sure, they may’ve been *close friends*. But that’s all they ever were. That’s all they ever will be.

“Why are you here?” Will said blankly, breaking the silence. “Jack Crawford send you?”

She nodded slowly, almost scared to admit the answer, even if she knew Will already had it all figured out.

“I don’t think we’ve ever been alone in a room together. Have we?” Will was starting to feel agitated. All he wanted to do now was irritate the itch more.

Alana took a pause before answering in the calmest tone she could. “I haven't noticed. Have we?” She looked back to the two sleeping figures in the room, then to Will. “Not that we’re necessarily alone now.”

Will didn’t hide how he rolled his eyes. “Yeah, right.” He cracked his neck, trying to shake off the tiredness that overwhelmed him. “Back to- *Jack Crawford’s crime gimp.*”

Alana avoided looking at Will, instead her eyes bounced from the floor and to bed beside her. “I don’t need to talk about it, if you don’t.”

Will shook his head. “No, no. You need to. You have to get it out of your system, go on. Talk away.”

“Will- please.” Silence crept up on the room. Alana sighed. “You fired a shot at someone for the first time yesterday. Not only that, but you fired eight times and killed a man.”

“Thanks for the reminder, I was almost starting to forget.” Will was too tired to hold back his words.

Alana swallowed. “Do you not *feel* anything?”

Will said nothing. Instead he stared at the sleeping man in front of him, focusing only on Hannibal’s figure.

“They want you back at the academy tomorrow.” Alana walked over to the exit. “I’ll see you then, Will.” She walked out, making no effort to shut the door in a calm manner.

Will held his head in his hands, slumping with exhaustion into himself. “She’s gone now.” He said to the room.

“How did you guess that I wasn’t asleep?” Hannibal opened his eyes and lifted his head from his shoulders.

Will looked up to meet the other man’s gaze. “You used to do the exact same thing whenever I suggested we ordered take out.” He let out a small chuckle at the memory. “You think I can’t tell the difference between when you’re actually asleep and not?”

Hannibal seemed surprised at Will’s statement. He’d never known that his fabrications had been so obvious.

“Don’t worry. Alana clearly didn’t notice.” Will said.

“She simply doesn’t have your years of experience.”

Will shied away from Hannibal’s gaze, looking instead to the unconscious girl in the middle of them. “I heard you two were friends, is that not the case?”

Hannibal shook his head. “It’s more of an unrequited awkwardness in our relationship, along with other feelings of one-sidedness.”

Will raised his eyebrows, initiating Hannibal to explain further.

“I noticed that Alana wanted something more than friendship in our relationship, however, even after I tried to let her down gently, she didn’t quite understand the problem with her want.”

“Aren’t you married? Why didn’t you just tell her?” Will knew all too well that that single statement could make someone back down like an obedient dog.

Hannibal sighed, as if he was trying to figure out his words. “To her, yes, I’m married. Unfortunately, I found out the hard way that words spread fast in the FBI. So now, to everyone, I’m married.”

Will’s eyes widened as he realised the stupidity of the situation. He let out a laugh, clapping his hands together. “That’s amazing. You told Alana you were married to get out of sleeping with her?”

Hannibal did not seem quite as amused as Will. “I told her I had been *seeing someone*.”

Will tried to speak through his fit of laughter. “And now the whole of Baltimore thinks you have some sort of secret wife?”

“So it would seem.” Hannibal muttered dimly.

“You know, I feel somewhat sorry for you.”

“That’s reassuring Will. Thank you.” Hannibal said sarcastically. He crossed one leg over the other as he sat in his chair. His stern demeanour soon cracked as he watched Will gasp in hysterics. He found himself laughing along with the younger man.

The laughter in the room died down after a few minutes.

Will sighed a breath that could be considered as relief. He craned his neck to look at the ceiling. His voice was still cloudy with tiredness. “I um- If you ignore the second half. I had fun yesterday.” Will glanced to watch Hannibal from the corner of his eye.

Hannibal smiled fondly to himself, his gentle eyes glinting with the artificial light. “I did too.”

“And uh-” Well gestured towards Abigail. “Thank you for staying with her the whole time.”

Hannibal looked to Abigail. “I didn’t want her waking up alone.”

Will felt a stab to his heart just from those few words. He understood that his connection with Abigail Hobbs was based solely on Will’s delve into her Father’s mind. But still, that didn’t mean the emotions he was feeling weren’t *real.*

He swallowed and nodded, scared that if he spoke it might come out in a series of cracks and sobs.

“Now I must warn you, Will.” Will’s attention quickly shot back to the older man. “When you inevitably go back to your classroom, I fear an ambush will be in order.”

“I’ll have to tell Jack you ruined his surprise.”

“I’m sure he’ll be ever so disappointed to hear such news.”

“We’ll see.”

The silence that fell on the room was comforting. The two men sat together in the warm blanket of quiet for a few minutes longer.

“I know it’s bad for me.” Will said, staring at Abigail.

Hannibal looked over to him, watching and waiting for the younger man to continue.

“I know I can’t get so attached. She won’t even know who I am when she wakes up.” He leaned back into his seat, his hands still clenched tightly to the fabric of Hannibal’s suit jacket. “But I can’t help but feel responsible for where she is right now.”

“You saved her life, Will.” Hannibal said assuringly. “The only thing you’re responsible for is saving her from her own Father.”

“I just think- at her age,” Will shook his head. “I would’ve rather gone down as well.”

“It was at her age that you met me. Would you have still preferred to die even knowing what the future held for you?”

Will contemplated Hannibal’s words. *Was it all worth it?* He thought to himself. Would the years of pain without Hannibal felt different if he had known what it was all leading up to?

He looked from Abigail and over to Hannibal, meeting the man’s deep red eyes. “I think that we should save this kind of conversation for my first session.”

Hannibal raised his eyebrows. “You’ve agreed to attend therapy, what was the occasion?”

Will looked away from Hannibal’s gaze as he started to speak. “Jack’s going to find a way to force me one way or another. I felt that if I was going to have to sit through an hour of talking about my feelings, I’d rather it be with you than some pretentious stranger.” He said it as it was more of a fact than an opinion.

“Very well.” Will could hear the smile in Hannibal’s voice.

“That doesn’t mean I don’t think you're pretentious. You just aren’t a stranger.”

“Of course.”

Will stood up from his seat and made his way over to the door.

“Where are you going now?” Hannibal asked. His tone wasn’t accusing, he was simply curious.

“I’m off to feed my cats, then get blackout drunk whilst pretending I don’t have to be at work in the morning.”

“Well it sounds like fun. Perhaps I’ll join you some time.”

“I’ll buy some cheap wine and we can pretend we’re still twenty.”

“I can’t wait.”

Will turned back to the door, he reached out to pull it open, only to realise his hand was already occupied. Turning to Hannibal, he took a few steps closer to the man. “Sorry, almost forgot this.” He handed him the suit jacket. “Thanks, again.”

Hannibal took the piece of clothing from Will. “It’s my pleasure.” He smiled politely. “I suppose I’ll see you tomorrow then. For our first session together.”

Perhaps. Is what Will would usually say. Instead, he settled on, “Yeah.” He nodded his head. “See you tomorrow.”

With that, Will took in Hannibal’s pleased face one last time, and left the room. He walked down the corridors of a hospital - for the first time - smiling.

-Espoir-

Just as Will promised, he found himself barely conscious with a nearly finished bottle of Jack Daniel's by his unlit fireplace by 11PM.

A black cat curled up on his lap, which he stroked lazily with his free hand. Winston sat comfortably at his feet, next to the empty bottle on the floor.

Will understood the addiction gene that ran through his body. Both parents had been addicts of some kind, so there was no doubt it would pass onto their son somehow. But, that was the worst part. Will understood this completely, yet did nothing about it.

He understood his actions, he understood that his approaching connection with Abigail Hobbs would come right back for him if he let it run without a leash, he understood that almost every choice he made would somehow end up coming back around to bite him.

And it wasn't as if he didn't feel guilty about all of these things. No. He felt guilt. He felt guilt harder than he imagined anyone else did.

But for some unknown reason, he couldn't give himself a valid excuse to stop.

This is what Will's life came to. A cycle. A cycle of guilt, a cycle of addiction, a cycle of routine. And it all came back around to lap him. He would never be able to catch up, that much was evident in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Special shoutout to @y0inks - that mf is my favourite person right now I swear, their comments are literally one of my main reasons to carry on updating.

As always, thank you so much to everyone who reads my work, it means so much.

I'm sick more often these days, which means I have more time at home to be writing. However, because I'm sick I have no motivation to write, so it's sort of like an endless loophole of doing nothing.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will re-organized his desk as students filed out of the classroom. He didn't want to look up and face the threat that he knew was coming.

Hannibal had warned him that an ambush from Jack Crawford was due any minute now, and Hannibal's predictions were never wrong.

Almost on cue, Will spotted the vibrant red of Alana Bloom's skirt from his peripheral vision, followed closely by the stoic silhouette of Jack Crawford himself.

Alana stood in front of Will's desk, watching him as he fumbled with papers in an attempt to seem busy.

"Hello, Will." She finally said after realising she'd have to take the initiative.

Will didn't respond. He was waiting for whatever follow up question he was about to be shot down with. He wondered for a moment if he was about to be hit with another one of Alana's interventions. If she really wanted Will to go through another one of those, it'd be quicker to hand him a flyer for a local AA meeting.

Jack stood beside Alana, also watching Will pack his supplies into his beaten up satchel bag.

"How was class?" Jack asked, he glanced over to meet Alana's eyes, as if they were somehow talking behind Will's back, only to his face.

Will slipped his laptop into the bag. "They applauded, it was inappropriate."

"The review board would beg to differ," Jack carried on his knowing glances to Alana. "They've okayed active return to the field." Will was sure Jack sounded almost happy.

Will didn't say anything. He wasn't sure what he was waiting for. Perhaps for Alana to butt in and protest that Will was too frail and unstable to be out of his classroom.

Jack's tone changed to one with a hint of annoyance at the lack of Will's response. "I want you back in the field,"

Was this what Hannibal had warned him about?

"And I've told the board that I'm recommending a psych eval."

That's what Hannibal had warned him about.

Will mouthed the word 'oh' as he nodded his head. He looked up at Alana. "Is it starting now?"

Alana gave her usual condescending smile. “Oh, no. The session wouldn’t be with me.”

Jack was quick to tail her words. “Hannibal Lecter is a better fit.” Will raised his eyebrows, waiting to hear Jack’s reasoning. “Your relationship isn't personal.” Will bit back a smirk as well as an eye roll. Jack clearly took his sarcastic expression as one of annoyance or discomfort, so he quickly added, “But if you are more comfortable with Doctor Bloom-”

Will cut Jack off before he even knew he was speaking. “No,” Will had to think quickly here, ‘I want Hannibal as my psychiatrist so I can check if he still wants to fuck me’ wouldn’t exactly be the right answer here. So instead he went with, “It’s fine. I don’t want someone I see as a friend inside my head.”

It was practically the complete opposite from his actual reason, however, calling Alana ‘a friend’ was likely to mend whatever holes their conversation from yesterday had created. Meaning she was less likely to tattle to Jack and get him pulled back into the nuthouse for another month.

Jack seemed surprised. “So you agree, you’ll start sessions with Doctor Lecter?”

Will had finished packing his belongings up and was starting to lean towards exiting the room. “I had a talk with him yesterday. He speaks in a very convincing way.” He kept his tone as lifeless as always, trying not to insinuate anything.

Jack nodded. “That’s good.” He clicked his tongue, trying to think of what else to say before Will ran away. “Remember, it’s nothing official - just *conversations* per se.”

Will had nearly made his way to the door, however his body was half turned towards the two people in his classroom. “Wait, so the psych eval isn’t a formality?”

Jack’s pleased look quickly shifted back into his usual anger. “No, it’s so I can get some sleep at night. I asked you to get close to the Hobbs thing, I need to know you didn’t get too close.”

Will sighed, finding himself more and more irritated as the conversation progressed. “Like I said, I had a talk with Lecter. Therapy takes time and if you don’t see any progress,” Will looked up from the floor to make eye contact with Jack. “You can have me solving cases from behind the bars of the BSHCI.”

Jack was clearly taken aback from that last comment and was doing a horrific job at hiding it. “I’ll take that as a promise.”

Will took off his glasses, tucking them into his inside pocket as he turned to walk out. “Of course you will.”

-Espoir-

The underground shooting range of the FBI academy was abnormally quiet for a place where gunshots were going off every minute. The black walls had the usual basement dampness, as well as rusty metal beams running over the ceiling.

Will fired eight shots into the target in front of him. Every pull of the trigger was as if someone was trying to pull the bones of his shoulder away from his body. He missed the majority of his shots, the few that hit landed on the outskirts of the human silhouette.

For a moment, the look of the target felt almost morbid. Sure, the whole reason for practising such a skill was to meet the end goal of shooting a human. Will knew that it was this reason that he was alone. He was sure that there was no one else in the world who'd spend their lunch break thinking about killing someone.

It wasn't as if he wanted to be down here either. What he wanted was to understand himself.

When Will shot Garret Jacob Hobbs, all eight bullets landed in his body. But now, he's lucky if he lands a shot on the paper target.

The theory of being alone is quickly shunned away as Will takes off his ear protection.

"I'm pretty sure firearm accuracy isn't the most valuable skill for a teacher. Shouldn't you be marking papers in a dark corner somewhere?" Beverly's voice rang out in the echoes of the basement.

"Well, I was in the field before. Everyone's well aware of how that went." There was a hint of bitterness in Will's tone as he faced away from the other person in the room.

"Now you're back in the saddle," Beverly sounded happy for Will, in a sort of piteous way. "-ish." She added.

Will hummed in agreement. He tried not to give silence as an answer when speaking with Beverly.

"Zeller wanted to give you the bullets he pulled out of Hobbs in an acrylic case. I told him you wouldn't find it funny."

"Probably not." Will agreed, finally turning away from the range to face Beverly.

She met him with a smile. "I suggested one of the clackin' swinging ball things - you know the things that rich people have on the mantle."

Will sighed in amusement. "That would've been funny." He slipped his ear protection back on, Beverly doing the same.

Turning back to the target, Will shot two more times. Both bullets missed the silhouette completely, just hitting the white background of the target.

Beverly talked loudly over the muffled hearing of their ear protection. "You're a weaver." She was referring to his stance. "I took you for an isosceles guy."

Will pulled the blue sleeves of his shirt up, finding himself becoming more annoyed as he missed more shots. “I have a rotator cuff issue, among other injuries. I have to use the weaver stance.”

Will suddenly felt Beverly’s touch on his shoulders. If it were anyone else, he probably would’ve whipped the gun around and shot them instead of the target. She pulled him into a different position, reposing his arms. “God, you *are* tight.”

“I was stabbed when I was a cop, and again on the Buffalo Bill case.” Will said matter-of-factly.

Beverly now stood next to Will. She glanced at his arms, checking his stance. “I’ve never noticed that.” She pointed to the watch that decorated Will’s wrist. “You’re a watch guy?”

Will took one hand off of the gun, bringing his wrist closer to himself. “No. It was a gift from a friend.”

“It’s pretty. The strap is in need of a replacement, looks expensive though. Is this *friend* single.” She teased.

“I fail to see how that’s relevant.” He muttered. “Are *you* a watch guy?”

Beverly scoffed. “Me, no?” She gestured to the cheap, basic strap around her wrist. “Brian is though. Maybe you can introduce your friend to him, that way he’ll finally have someone to talk to about his jewellery. They’ll get along swimmingly I’m sure.”

Will stared at the small gold flecks on the clock. “I doubt that. He and Zeller have, *conflicting* personalities.”

Beverly laughed. “I’m pretty sure everyone has a conflicting personality with Brian Zeller.”

“Jimmy Price doesn’t.” Will pointed out.

“Yeah well, that’s because Jimmy Price can get along with anyone. It’s like his superpower or something.”

Will nodded, finally managing to bring his eyes away from the watch and to the space in front of him.

Beverly moved Will’s shoulders into place one last time and stepped back. “Try that.” She said.

Three shots fired out of the barrel, and each one of them hit points of the target. Will would have to find a good way to thank Beverly for teaching him how to kill a man properly.

Will slipped the protective gear off his head, placed his gun back in his holster and turned back to face the woman behind him. “That was better.” He nodded, hoping that she’d understand his thanks. “Now, you didn’t come all the way down here to teach me how to shoot.”

Beverly put her hands up in faux surrender. “Never said I did. Jack sent me to find out what you know about gardening.”

Will blinked a few times. “Gardening?” He asked suspiciously.

She put her hands back down to her sides. “I guess he thinks you’re just a really *fun guy.*”

“Mushrooms,” Will said solemnly. “Do I want to know?”

Beverly shrugged. “I’ll give you the rundown on the way there.”

Will shook his head, his fingers twitched nervously around the fabric of his jeans. “I have an appointment this evening.”

Beverly raised her eyebrows in surprise. “An *appointment* huh? With who?” She asked in a playfully flirtatious way.

Will found himself used to his friend’s teasing, so he didn’t bother rolling his eyes. “Doctor Lecter. I agreed to start therapy with him.”

Beverly groaned. “I’m spending my evening next to a fungi infested corpse, whilst Will Graham is spending his with a man straight out of a European Grey’s Anatomy?” She clicked her tongue. “Since when did your life become better than mine?”

“Trust me, if there was an option to switch with you, I would.” *That was a lie.*

With a sigh, Beverly cracked her knuckles and turned around. “C’mon then. The only thing that could make my night worse would be Jack Crawford shouting at me for being a few minutes late to something that couldn’t physically go anywhere.”

Will followed, bending down to place the ear protection into a basket on the floor. As he bent back up from where he leant down to, a sudden mixture of dizziness, nausea and a burning feeling in his head hit him like a train. Tripping backwards over his feet, Will managed to grab on to the safety of a support pillar. He stabilised himself on his feet, along with trying to cast away the dull ache of his forehead and dizziness of the world around him.

There was a voice, someone calling out a word. The sound was muffled, as if Will still had his ear protectors on.

Will blinked over and over again, trying to force his blurry vision back to normal. He could feel himself sway on his feet as he gripped tightly onto the pillar beside him.

The wave of nausea, along with a sharp pain in his stomach gave him the strong urge to throw up, however he quickly fought that down.

“Will?” The alarmed voice finally broke through to Will’s ears. He tried to collect his breath as he looked up to find the source of the sound.

Beverly was reluctant to touch Will, not knowing exactly what was wrong with him at this given moment, however she reached out to hold the arm that wasn’t gripped to the metal

pillar.

“Will, are you okay?”

Will focused his eyes, trying to unblur Beverly’s features. “Yeah, yeah I’m fine.”

Beverly didn’t look convinced. “Really? Because that wasn’t something that a *fine* person would do.”

“I get migraines.” Will still hadn’t regulated his breathing. He pulled a small pack of aspirin from his trouser pocket and frantically shoved two pills down his throat.

Beverly watched the motion go down with a look of both horror and sympathy. “If you’re *’migraines’* are that bad, I think you should go see someone about it.” She was careful not to use the word ‘doctor’. She wasn’t sure why, but something deep down told her it would set something off.

“I’m seeing Doctor Lecter this evening, am I not? He used to work in medicine. I’ll just mention it to him at some point.”

Beverly shook her head. “When did you last eat something? You’re pale as a ghost, Will.”

Will shrugged nonchalantly. “I don’t keep track of stuff like that.”

“Oh don’t give me that, Graham. C’mon, I’ll call Jack and tell him we’ll be a little late. Let’s go grab a soggy sandwich from the canteen.”

Will nodded in defeat. “Okay.” Was all he said before Beverly was pulling him off to their next destination.

It wasn’t entirely a lie. In fact, it wasn’t a lie at all. Will couldn’t keep track of what he was and wasn’t doing. He’d acknowledged the loss of time he’d been experiencing lately. However, he’d just been brushing it off as a late side effect of the medication they had him on after the Buffalo Bill case.

The last genuine memory Will had of eating food was the meal Hannibal had brought him. Apart from that, he could’ve cooked a six course dinner without realising it.

Jack was as unsympathetic as usual when Will finally arrived at the crime scene. He wondered for a second if Beverly had ever actually called Jack to let him know that they’d be late. Because from the look on his face, you might as well think that Will showed up an hour late, only to say *’and what?’*.

Thankfully, Will decided against doing that. Instead, he answered Jack’s poor attempts at conversation with the least emotion in his voice he could manage.

The other two thirds of the science team gave Will the same rundown that Beverly had given him in the car, only with example evidence in front of them.

Will wasn't sure how long he spent in someone else's mind. He let the pendulum swing and watched as time reversed itself for him.

Everything was going well, or in better words, according to how it usually went. The painting he kneeled on was his design, his creation.

Until it wasn't.

Instead of the fungal infected corpse he had started with, Garret Jacob Hobbs lay beside Will, half submerged into the soil next to his knees.

Will screwed his eyes shut over and over again, desperately trying to free himself of the clutches of someone else's mind. Instinct kicking in, Will reached for his pocket in an attempt to pull out his usual dose of aspirin.

This weak attempt was quickly shut down by the cold flesh of a hand gripping onto Will's wrist.

He let out a gasp, suddenly realising he'd been forgetting to breathe. Someone yelled something, but only the noise and not the words made it through to Will's ears.

Standing up quickly, Will walked quickly away from the scene. He carried himself past Jack on his shaky legs, praying to whoever would listen that he wouldn't collapse in front of his boss.

"Will-" Jack reached out to grab Will's arm.

"I have a therapy session." Will managed to flinch away from the touch before it made contact.

Before Jack could find a reason to keep Will on the scene, he was gone.

-Espoir-

The stride of confidence quickly ushered away as soon as Will pulled his car into the driveway of the building.

It was safe to assume that Hannibal's office was also his house, seeing as there wasn't exactly a reason for a therapist's office to have three floors.

Will held his hands on the steering wheel, clenching his fists to the worn leather so tightly that his knuckles began to whiten.

He glanced at his watch. There were six minutes before Will's session officially started.
Would it come off as too eager if I walked in now? Or maybe I should go in now. Hannibal

always showed up at least ten minutes earlier than the given time. So if I'm going off that rule, I'm already four minutes late.

Taking his hands off the wheel, Will rubbed his palms over the coarse fabric on his thighs. He knew he was overthinking every little thing. He always did when it came to Hannibal. And now they aren't just college kids fucking about. Hannibal is Doctor Lecter now, and Will is about to attend a psychiatric evaluation with him.

Will sighed to himself, and finally made the decision to get out the vehicle.

The air outside was cold but dry, leaving a burning feeling in the back of Will's throat as he breathed in. Along with the added darkness of the evening sky, the atmosphere felt tense and unwelcoming. If anything, it was quite a familiar environment for a therapist's office.

Pushing open the door of the large building, Will found himself in a small waiting room. There were two chairs and a small leather couch.

The whole setting of the room instantly took Will back to the days he spent in Hannibal's penthouse. The dim lights, the strange pieces of artwork on the walls. Everything was exactly fitted to Hannibal's personal style. It wasn't a relaxing place of comfort, like most waiting rooms were designed to be. Instead, it had a cold and dark feeling that had Will almost on edge. The only thing keeping the hairs on his arms from standing up was the general familiarity the place brough to his mind. This feeling returned some of the warmth that the dark green walls had sucked out of him.

"Will."

Will turned around as soon as he heard that smooth voice. Hannibal stood in front of him, clad in the most hideous suit Will had ever laid eyes on. And yet, he looked straight out of a designer magazine.

"Please, come in." Hannibal smiled, gesturing to the door he held open.

Will nodded and managed to get his legs to move in the direction of the door. "Thanks." He said quietly.

Hannibal closed the door behind them as he watched Will survey the contents of his office. He looked not only with his eyes, but with his hands as well.

Will ran his hands over the smoothness of the black stag statue, caressing its cold antlers with the soft touch of his fingers. He moved throughout the room in silence, occasionally feeling the hard wood of a bookshelf or the plush leather of a seat.

Turning back to find Hannibal, Will saw him writing on a piece of paper, leaning on the desk in the middle of the room.

"What's that?" Will asked as he peered over Hannibal's shoulder.

Hannibal signed the bottom of the document before showing it to Will. "Your psychological evaluation." He slid the paper over to Will. "You're totally functional and more or less sane.

Well done."

Will could hear the smile in the older man's voice as he scanned over the paper. "Is that opinion or fact?"

"Psychiatry is full of people blurring those lines."

"How unethical of you, Doctor."

"Our conversation can now proceed unobstructed by paperwork."

Will was silent, staring at the document in front of him.

"This is a therapy session, Will. Feel free to speak whatever you're thinking." Hannibal said soothingly.

Will didn't look up at him. "Yeah because I'm always keeping my opinions to myself." He said sarcastically.

Hannibal smiled. "I find your rudeness most charming."

Will cocked his head. "Yeah, unfortunately not everyone has quite the same thought process as you. If everyone found my rudeness *charming* I might as well be Brad Pitt." He let out a laugh of pity at his own terrible joke.

The office was filled with a fog of silence. Only to suddenly be swept away with a few words from Will.

It started off as a few words, but then quickly turned into a long rambling about Garrett Jacob Hobbs along with his opinions and thoughts of their current mushroom killer. Hannibal occasionally jumped in on Will's chatting, their conversation firing back and forth like a well duelled sword fight.

Finally coming to a stop, Will looked down at the table he was leaning on. He took the sighed psychiatric evolution and slid it back to Hannibal. "This may be premature."

Hannibal paused to nod before replying. "Is that opinion or fact?"

"Pretty sure you answered that question yourself." Will sighed.

Hannibal let a small laugh out of his nose. "Jack Crawford may rest his weary head knowing he didn't break you for a second time."

The last two words caused Will to quickly look up and check Hannibal's expression. He was met with the smiling eyes and comforting face of the older man already looking at him. The sudden nervousness that had caught up to Will in the waiting room suddenly returned.

"How much do you know about…" Will tried to find words other than *me being thrown in a psych ward for a little while* "Everything." He dashed his eyes back to the treated wooden table below him.

Thankfully, Hannibal quickly knew what he was referring to and saved him from himself. “As much as Jack Crawford has told me.”

Will’s uneasiness was quickly replaced by resentment for the name mentioned. “Jack Crawford would have me thrown back in a nuthouse if it weren’t for my uses.”

“I never said he was a reliable source.”

“No one as smart as you should say such things.” Will said sarcastically.

“Jack Crawford said you need therapy, and you agreed.”

Will wasn’t sure if Hannibal had just asked him a question or simply stated a fact. Either way, he knew it was about to lead onto something.

“I did.”

Hannibal nodded his head before turning his entire body to face Will, making the younger man look back up to make eye contact. “Why was that?”

Will rolled his eyes, uncaring of Hannibal’s known distaste for rudeness. “We’ve already had this conversation- why do you think so?”

“What you need is a way out of the dark places that Jack Crawford sends you into. Whether that may be therapy or not, only time will tell.”

Will started another walk around Hannibal’s office, again running his hands over random surfaces. “Last time he sent me into a dark place, I brought something back. Is that what you want to hear about?”

Hannibal watched him intently. “If that is what you wish to speak about, then I’d be happy to listen.”

Will found himself stopping next to a piano-like instrument. He’d remembered seeing one in Hannibal’s penthouse. The older man had even played it once or twice for Will during one of their drunken evenings together. It had a strange name, one that sounded like it was meant for something that looked more like a violin. Still, Will just couldn’t quite remember the name of it. He stood silently next to the instrument, waiting for Hannibal to get to his point.

Thankfully, Hannibal quickly figured out the meaning of the silence and started to speak again. “You saved Abigail Hobbs’ life. You also orphaned her.” He watched as Will ran a finger over the edge of the harpsichord. “That as well as the case you previously worked on comes with serious emotional obligations, regardless of empathy disorders.”

Will quickly took his hands away from the wooden edges in front of him and tightened his fists around themselves.

“See, this is what everyone is worried about. Christ, even Jack seemed a little worried at one point.” He turned to face Hannibal, meeting his eyes across the room. “Everyone thinks this is my first time killing, so now I’m all fucked up and batshit crazy.”

“Was Garret Jacob Hobbs not the first person you’ve killed?” His tone had suddenly changed from the classic monotone therapist voice, to one of genuine curiosity.

Will shook this sudden change of tone as actual curiosity for something morbid. Hannibal had always enjoyed sitting in on Will’s lectures and was never bothered by any of the old crime scene photos that were used in every powerpoint. This was just Hannibal being Hannibal.

Will’s breathing began to speed up as he felt himself unable to get his point across. “That’s not what I’m saying.” He quickly replied.

Hannibal shot back as quickly as Will did. “What are you saying then?”

Will sighed. “People have finally found an excuse for me being batshit crazy. Deep down, everyone knows, *even I know*, that there’s something wrong.” His breathing regulated and his legs began to feel more stable. “But nobody wants to believe that. Nobody wants to believe that I’m different. They want there to be a logical reasoning for it.”

The room was coated with a heavy blanket of silence for a short moment.

The heaviness of this blanket was a strange feeling on Will’s senses. Still, it was an odd comfort.

“You do not feel responsibility for killing Garret Jacob Hobbs?”

It was said like a question, but really Will knew that Hannibal was simply speaking his thoughts.

“Could have worded it better myself, but yes. No matter who’s mind I force myself into, I can’t find myself to feel any guilt, any remorse, any responsibility.”

Hannibal stopped to think for a moment, their conversation leading into silence but not ending.

The version of Will that stood before him obviously wasn’t the same kind that he met 18 years ago, and that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. But it also wasn’t a good thing.

Hannibal would have to observe Will more, however it was clear to see that the personality and front that Will once had was lost. *Not gone, but lost.*

“You change the way you’re perceived depending on the person in front of you. Perhaps that is why people can’t understand your actual feelings of the situation.” Hannibal knew that Will wouldn’t take offence to this. Instead, he’d see it as just an observation or a suggestion.

Will’s erratic breathing returned as he took a deep breath before speaking. His finger drummed a repeated beat onto the sides of his legs as he tried to finally get his point into words.

“I can’t help it. I don’t *know* how to control who’s feelings I take in.” He sucked in a shaky breath. Hannibal watched his throat as the air vibrated through his neck. “Sometimes I feel

more like the characters I create in my head, more than myself."

Will screwed his eyes tight, desperately trying to block his own emotions away from himself.

Watching the scene unfold, Hannibal found himself making his way across the room from where he stood, and over to Will. He stood close to the younger man, but not close enough to scare him away. Hannibal didn't speak, he could see that Will wasn't quite done, and he had more to say.

Eyes finally opening, Will bit his lip in hopes of holding back a sob. He didn't flinch when realising Hannibal's close presence, somehow it brought an odd sense of relief. He could feel the burn of salty tears begin to gather in his sockets.

"I know that one of these characters is me." He didn't dare look up from the floor to meet Hannibal's gaze. "I'm just not sure which one." He managed to choke out through a shaky breath.

Hannibal let a moment of quiet pass.

"You didn't feel bad about killing Hobbs. You felt bad because killing him felt so good."

Will felt his lips tingle, like his body knew that the words that were about to come out shouldn't be said aloud.

His voice was melted down to just a whisper. As if there were someone else in the room that may overhear the conversation. "I liked killing Hobbs."

Will felt Hannibal's silence like a whip on his back. A sudden wave of stupidity rushed over him as the present filled out around him. He hadn't cried in front of anyone for years. In fact, he hadn't cried in front of anyone other than Hannibal. All these years later, and Hannibal's opinion of him was going to be the same as everyone else's. *An unstable alcoholic, who's unable to change in any way.*

"I'm- I'm sorry, Hannibal. It doesn't usually go like this." Will instinctively moved the sleeve of his jacket over his face, wiping away any stray tears. "Hell, I don't usually get this far into a therapy session." He choked out a pitiful laugh in hopes of making his words less self-deprecating.

As Will was wiping his jacket over his cheeks, he felt a sudden warmth grab his arm.

Hannibal pulled Will's hands away from his face. He kept one hand placed on the shorter man's forearm, whilst the other moved to dramatically take out his pocket square. It revealed a beautifully patterned, maroon coloured handkerchief, which Will quickly discovered the softness of the pretty fabric.

Hannibal gently wiped under Will's eyes, making sure to carefully dab away the wetness of his glistening cheeks. "You're not alone with this feeling. Although it may be related to your unique empathy, there are many other people in this world who have felt this way. And many

of those people have found themselves in the messes of their own mind." Hannibal retracted the handkerchief from Will's face and folded it back up to fit into his front pocket.

Will felt the touch of Hannibal's hand move from his forearm, only to snake down to his hand. The shift was almost unnoticeable, however Will had fixated on Hannibal's hand placement as soon as their touch met.

The close proximity with the older man was odd but not unwelcome. Their closeness felt almost intimate, as well as the combined silence over the room.

Hannibal's hand was lightly held over Will's, so the younger man took the initiative to grip the other's hand back.

Will heard as the silence was disturbed by a strong inhale from Hannibal. He almost laughed at the strange behaviour. "Did you just smell me, *Doctor*?"

Hannibal quickly retracted his body slightly away from Will, still keeping the hands intertwined. "Difficult to avoid." Will scoffed. "Eighteen years and you're still using that god-awful aftershave."

Relief flooded Will as he realised Hannibal wasn't saying he smelt unhygienic. "Perhaps I kept buying it in hopes that I'd run into you again."

The sombre environment that once clouded Hannibal's office was quickly washed away and dried up by the cloudy haze of amusement.

"Well it seems your plan has finally worked. I must say I recognised the scent as soon as you walked into Jack's office."

Will watched Hannibal's face as he gave Will a smile. It was a smile that he'd missed so dearly, one that showed Hannibal's unique set of teeth. He'd dreamt about those sharp canines, fantasised about the older man's fangs digging deep into his skin and leaving deep, obvious marks all over him. It would be so easy for everyone to identify the culprit of the bites just from the shape alone. People would know who Will was claimed by.

With a blush, Will finally pulled his eyes away from Hannibal's strong gaze. Any moment longer spent in that red sea would have him drowning for eternity.

Hannibal smiled to himself as he closely watched Will's flustered expression. "A penny for your thoughts?" He watched again as his voice caused the reddening fog to spread to the tips of Will's ears.

"I forgot how much I missed you." Will's voice was barely a whisper. If Hannibal hadn't been standing so close, there was no chance he would've heard it.

"There hasn't been a day that's gone by, where I haven't felt alone without you, my sweet William."

Will let out a small laugh. "*Sweet William?* Is that a new nickname?"

Hannibal's thumb circled the skin on Will's hand. "Dianthus Barbatus is the other name of the flower. However, it was named for William Augustus, duke of Cumberland, who led British forces against the Jacobites at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Now, the plant symbolises gallantry, and in some cases, royal love."

Will smiled fondly at Hannibal. "Good to know I always have someone to go to if I need a history lesson on flowers."

"Sweet Williams can also be added to any dish for a perfect garnish. Perhaps you'll be the muse for my next dish. I'd love to cook for you again."

Will shrugged. "I mean, the offer to get shitfaced with me tomorrow night is still up. You can bring a few flowers to snack on if you really want to."

Hannibal's finger continued to search the grooves of Will's hand idly. "Please, I'd love to cook for you beforehand. Of course I could pick you up if it's an inconvenience to drive."

Will had originally assumed that they'd be spending the evening at his house, however exploring Hannibal's residence further was an option he was open to.

"It's fine, I can get myself here." He gave a small smile. "What time should I aim for?"

Deep down, Will knew that suggesting this idea was definitely a bad one. There was a very strong possibility of him fucking up and saying something he shouldn't, and that could very well happen whilst sober. So god knows what'll happen under the influence.

Even after years and years of drinking, Will was still considered to be a 'lightweight', so he was well aware of the consequences of a few sips. However, the heat of the moment and the rush of excitement at the thought of being with Hannibal in a situation created by something other than work was just too good to pass up.

"Four O'clock, you can sit with me whilst I prepare our meal." Hannibal sounded pleased as he spoke.

"I'll see you there then, Doctor Lecter."

As soon as Will said that, the smoothing motion of Hannibal's fingers over his hand came to a sudden stop.

Assuming he'd said something wrong, Will searched the older man's eyes for any look of discomfort, yet found nothing. He knew that Hannibal had always been difficult to read when it came to showing certain emotions, and clearly Will's ability to understand his microexpressions had somewhat faded over their years apart.

With the sudden panic that something had gone wrong, Will quickly revoked his hand away.

"I need to be off now, I- I should go." Will managed to force out as slowly walked himself to the door.

As if snapping out of a trance, Hannibal's eyes caught up to where Will had wandered over to. "You do?" He followed the younger man over to the exit.

Will looked awkwardly down at the floor. "Yeah, I need to feed the cats," He looked over to the large window at the opposite side of the room. "And it's getting pretty dark."

Hannibal nodded slowly. "Very well. Then it seems I'll see you tomorrow?" He offered a small smile towards Will as their eyes met.

Will returned the favour, mirroring Hannibal's polite expression. "Yeah, I'll see you soon." He moved to open the door, however was suddenly stopped by a firm hand on his shoulder.

"I almost forgot." Hannibal fished inside one of his pockets to pull out a small piece of card, which he handed to Will. "It's my personal business card. It had my phone number as well as my home address."

Will looked up from the card and gave a look of confusion. "Is this not where you live?" He asked cluelessly.

Hannibal let out a small breath of amusement through his nose. "No, my dear. This is just my office. I'd be putting myself in danger if certain patients knew where I lived."

"Oh, yeah I guess so." Will nodded in agreement. "Are you saying that I'm not a *danger* to you?"

"I'd say that you barely qualify for the title of one of my patients, let alone a dangerous one."

"Mm, I wouldn't speak so soon, Doctor. Don't you know that I'm the FBI's infamous, most unstable dog?"

"I said you weren't a danger to me, my sweet William. I never said you weren't unstable."

Will sucked his teeth and rolled his eyes in amusement. "And here you had me thinking you were different to everyone else." He said jokingly.

Hannibal raised his eyebrows. "Trust me, my dear. I'm very different from everyone else." His voice was slightly hushed, making his accent more prominent.

"Don't worry," Will winked. "Never doubted that for a second." His southern side suddenly showed through as he spoke.

Will finally reached to open the door, but something felt like it was missing. Goodbyes to Hannibal had always had this strange undertone of being unfinished.

"I'll see you tomorrow, then." Will made his way over to the exit of the building.

"Yes. Goodbye Will." Hannibal followed him through the waiting room and over to the door. He watched as the younger man stepped outside into the cold evening. "Drive safely." He couldn't help saying.

Will let out a small laugh as he walked down the steps outside the door. “Goodbye Hannibal.” He said with a laugh, finding amusement in Hannibal’s familiar protectiveness.

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The drive home was warm. Even though the heating in Will’s car had broken many moons ago, and it was the middle of March, the car was filled with a warm sense of comfort.

Will’s thoughts jumped between many things before finally landing on the anticipation of seeing his cats.

The cats were as much a source of comfort as they were one of the most beloved things in Will’s life. They kept him warm, curling up to his chest to sleep on cold nights. They kept him company during those painful, lonely months of recovery. They gave him reason, reason to come home every night, reason to keep himself in check.

Will hated to admit it, but the first stray he’d picked up was on a day where he was missing Hannibal dearly.

It had been the 20th of January - Hannibal’s birthday. Will had been fishing during a weekend off, and a small, tattered cat had watched him the entire time from the edge of the creek. He’d taken the cat to a vet, along with checking if it was some poor family’s missing cat. And after confirming it was just a stray cat, he’d taken the poor thing in.

Almost every small detail of Will’s current life could be somehow traced back to just one person.

One person that had only made two years of impact on his life, but that impact had the force of a fucking sledgehammer.

From the clothes Will wore, to the ways he found comfort in his sad life, everything could be traced back to Hannibal.

He sat in his beaten up car, the warm air smelling faintly of cat treats. The entire drive home, every thought that drifted into his mind somehow bounced back to Hannibal.

Will sat there in silence, playing back the smooth recordings of Hannibal’s deep voice. The way he had whispered so softly in that beautiful accent, then wiped the tears from Will’s face as if it were the most normal gesture in the world.

Will touched his cheeks with one hand, mirroring with his finger the same way Hannibal had touched him.

It just wasn’t the same.

Hannibal’s hands were so different to Will’s - soft, manicured, and taken care of. An artist’s hand. Will’s fingers felt rough against the plush skin of his cheeks, the worn down and sharp edges of his nails felt like knives when compared to the silk of Hannibal’s touch.

He remembered the way the older man had held his hand, latching on until Will had to leave.

Maybe there was still a spark of hope left for Will. Perhaps giving himself a chance at something good in life wasn't the worst idea in the world.

The fantasy of Hannibal's soft hands continued to expand further as Will drove down the dark roads of Baltimore to Virginia.

The once warm feeling he'd felt had been replaced with a much more intense *heat*.

The fantasies started to become more intense as well. Going from just small touches and holding each other's hand, to riskier touches and the way those soft hands would feel on much more sensitive parts of Will's body.

By the time he'd reached his home and let himself in the door, the feisty burn had only grown. Will tried to collect himself by completing his usual routine of feeding the cats, downing a quick few fingers of whiskey, then showering. However, even the stab of a cold shower couldn't wash away this burning passion.

Diving into his bed, Will decided it would be the best option to attempt to sleep it off. The clock on his bedside table read 10:14PM. Which, if he slept now, would leave him enough time to get enough sleep to make it through the day.

But still, that raging heat didn't wear off.

Will ran the coolness of his own fingertips over his collarbones, rubbing desperately at the heat of his neck. And like always, his mind quickly bounced back to Hannibal. He could feel the beat of his heart quicken by every second that passed.

He pictured the older man, his broad frame leaning over Will, his soft hands caressing his shoulders. Will's touch swiftly moved down, stopping at his chest to run those soft fingers over his nipples.

The cold metal of a piercing bar tinged the burning skin around it, making Will hiss and moan at the sudden pleasure of the pain. His eyes rolled back into his eyelids and his mouth hung agape.

He could feel the heat of his own cock hardening as he did so. The image of Hannibal mixing with the pulling pleasure of the piercings creating such an erotic feeling.

One of Will's hands finally decided to move much further down, where he was met with the sticky hardness of his burning cock. He rubbed his thumb over the tip, collecting a small amount of precum to rub around the head and the slit, bringing himself to full hardness.

Biting back another moan, Will slowly slid his hand up and down the shaft. He felt so desperate. Desperately trying not to call out Hannibal's name, but desperately trying to release himself from this sweaty prison.

It took another few strokes of his cock, and a hand pulling and twisting on his nipples, but Will still couldn't see himself finishing anytime soon.

Without thinking, he found himself reaching into the table beside him and rummaging a frantic hand inside one of the draws. His hand clasped around a cheap plastic bottle that his fingers were too familiar with.

Rapidly using one hand to pull down his underwear, Will used the other to squeeze out some lubrication onto his fingers.

He dropped the bottle somewhere onto the mattress beside him, uncaring of its whereabouts in the sweaty heat of the moment.

Will knew that it wouldn't take just a few strokes of his cock to finish anymore, he'd found out long ago that it would take him much more than that to bring himself to pleasure.

He found himself contorted into an awkward position, with his back arched into an aching curve, and one hand reaching desperately around himself.

Not bothering to muffle his own sounds, Will plunged a slick finger into himself. The sensitive walls of his hole sucked the one finger in like a cheap whore. He felt around the soft flesh inside, chasing his own pleasure.

After just a few thrusts into himself, Will decided he needed more. He added a second finger, which soon matched the slow thrusting pace of the other.

Will's whimpers and moans filled the dark corners of the small room. He knew too well that he was acting like a desperate slut, fingering himself to the thought of his own therapist. And still, even the thought of that had him quickening the pace of his own fingers.

His mind replaced his own calloused fingers with Hannibal's thick, smooth ones. Imaging the way Hannibal would look, hair down and wet, the way Will had seen him whenever it had rained. Will's slick fluids dripping down the curving veins and muscles of Hannibal's thick forearms.

The rhythm of Will's moans matched the pace of his thrusting fingers, rapid and non-stopping.

"*Mm*- ah, ah.."

He'd pleasures himself many times to the thought of Hannibal over the years, occasionally finding himself unable to become erect without thinking of the older man. But this time felt so much better. It had been just a few hours prior that Hannibal's had been clinging onto Will, looking so disappointed after finding out he had to leave.

Will rolled from his side, onto his back, repositioning his arm as he did so. He reached his two fingers back into his hole, the sensitive rim sending waves of euphoria around his body as the skin of his fingers brushed against it with every thrust.

The mattress below had become wet with lubrication and precum, but that didn't bother Will. He panted into the dark room, suddenly bringing himself to add another finger into himself.

The stretch was painful, but that pain was hugely overloaded with the amounts of pleasure Will was met with. Every time those three fingers curled and thrusted into his tight hole, his voice echoed against the walls in banshee-like moans.

He pictured Hannibal's skillful hands, his mind flashing back to a memory of the older man preparing a set of sheep lungs. The way those long fingers had reached inside the fleshy organ and found their way through the meat with precise investigation. Hannibal was a surgeon, he'd studied the human body for years, so there was no way that man wasn't a genius around Will's insides. He moaned at the mere thought.

Will's arched his back against the bed, grinding his ass into the hard mattress below. He was incredibly glad that his house was the only one for miles, otherwise he'd no doubt have noise complaints the next morning.

He inhaled a sharp breath, suddenly feeling the closeness of his orgasm. "Ah, *Hannibal*- oh, please- mm, fuck- ah.."

The intense hammering of his fingers into his tight, almost dry hole only became faster and faster as time went on.

Will's breathy moans turned into shouts of pleasure as he felt himself getting close. His voice became much higher when he lost control of himself like this. He moaned like a hopeless whore, begging to be used.

Will knew that what he was doing was intensely shameful, however had long decided that it was too late to get shy now. The skin of his chest shivered every time he pulled on his nipple, the action had given him such an intense pleasure ever since he was a curious teenager.

Will curled his fingers inside of him, fingering the spot that sat so deep into his core. His legs subconsciously spread further, the flexibility of his muscular legs somehow coming in useful.

Will's hips grinded up against his own hand as he chased his climax. He felt like an animal in heat, never stopping the grinding of his body for a second.

"Hann– Oh fuck, I'm gonna- ah..!"

His mumble of words was broken off by his own shouted moans.

Will continued to thrust into himself as the thick, white fluid flowed out of his stiff cock and onto his stomach. He pressed his fingers as deep as they could go, his hole sucking them in up to the knuckle as the tight rim fluttered around them.

"Yes… oh- please, ah- yes-"

His intense thrusts started to slow as the sticky high of his orgasm. Accented praises fluttered through Will's mind, calling him a *good boy*. He imagined the way Hannibal's cum would feel inside of him, how the thick fluid would feel as it dripped out of his beaten up, used hole.

Will's mouth was still hung open, with his breathy gasps and whimpers filling the silence.

It was safe to say that the once burning heat he'd tried to shake off was now replaced by a slightly more sticky, but less uncomfortable warmth.

He took his fingers out his tight hole and his other hand away from his pierced nipples. Will knew all too well that he'd pay the price of such a pleasure tomorrow, with a sensitive chest and difficulty sitting down on anything other than a cushioned office chair.

Pulling off his cum-stained shirt, Will quickly discarded the wet piece of clothing. His underwear was long gone, probably thrown under his bed somewhere to be found in a few weeks.

The rush of shame would hit him tomorrow, when he'd have to eat a meal with Hannibal. He'd have to sit down, for god knows how long, and make eye contact with his therapist/best friend whilst trying not to remember how he fingered himself open while screaming his name.

Will hated to admit it, but Hannibal had been his main source of masturbation material through the years. A lot of the time - *if not all the time* - Hannibal's face, his hands, his body, his voice would be the thing to flash through Will's mind just before an orgasm. It had always felt a little indecent of course, but that was when Will believed that he'd never see the older man again. Having to face him the next day was a completely different story.

He'd deal with whatever mess he was sleeping in when it was morning. The sheets were probably due a wash anyway, so it would've been a waste not to make the most out of it.

Will's dreams were infected with nightmares that night, however, not the usual ones. He wasn't haunted by bodies of dead teenagers, or fungus infected corpses, but instead by some sort of presence. This presence felt cold, like a dive into cold water during winter. But it also felt so welcoming.

This presence, *this being* was dark and corrupted. But it never caused any harm. It simply watched Will, followed him through the realms of his sleep - never getting too close. The being kept its distance, as if knowing about an invisible boundary.

The strange presence was odd to say the least, however not unwelcome. It was a pleasant change to the usual experience that Will had when sleeping.

Chapter End Notes

I have once again been off for the past week because of illness and blah blah blah so here's an update a few days early!!!!!!!!

Also, did you know that word 'Hannibal' is written 108 times here - which is about 3% of the entire chapter. Fun facts yk

Another fun fact - most of Will's dialogue is stuff that I write down on post-it notes during class. I come up with my best ideas in a science lab.

I can't WAIT to hit some plot points of this story, I'm just so excited for Hannibal and Will to finally realise that the warm feeling that they feel around each other is this magical thing called sexual tension and that Hannibal NEEDS to bend Will over that ladder already.

As always, every comment and kudos is appreciated, thank you so much for keeping up with this. I read every single comment and love all of them. :)

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The behavioural science unit was on the first floor in one of the many buildings of Quantico's FBI academy.

Specifically, the office in which Will's desk was situated, was practically underground. It was a small room, big enough for only a few desks, there were no windows and it was the last room of a very long, suspicious looking corridor.

Jack Crawford's office was one of the other rooms that occupied this dingy hallway, as well as a small, forgotten bathroom with only two stalls, and a few vacant rooms with abandoned files and a few stacked chairs.

Nobody *liked* going down to the behavioural science unit. You had to pass a morgue as well as Jack Crawford, so it was understandable why.

Will didn't mind it though. His small office very rarely had anyone other than Beverly, Jimmy and Brian in it. There would occasionally be a lost trainee, or a guest lecturer who'd been shunned into the equivalent of an old basement for the day.

It had what Will needed. His own space, no unfamiliar faces to bother him and a toilet with a lock on it. *What more could a man want?*

He sat in the cheap desk chair in the back corner of the room, searching for whatever news articles could give him information on Jack's current obsession. He'd called them *'The lost boys'* and had started talking at Will about them as soon as he stepped through the doors of the academy.

The case was as textbook as it could get - teenage boys going missing. Only, recently one of the boys' family had turned up murdered in their own home.

Will sighed to himself as he scrolled aimlessly through another slightly sketchy looking website.

He took a sip from the metal drink container on his desk, the pleasant burn of alcohol tingling nicely on his tongue.

This method for getting through the day was the only one that seemed to work. Some days, Will would go without his usual drink on the side, and those days always turned out to be the worst ones.

It was easier to take bad news with the blurry buzz. Easier to speak to people, easier to focus on himself.

Only once, had someone discovered Will's habits.

During the Buffalo Bill case, nobody had been able to reach Will for about two days. He didn't show up to work or answer any calls. Unfortunately, Alana had been the one who Jack sent to his house to 'check up' on him.

She'd found Will asleep in a pool of his own vomit, surrounded by empty bottles and a plethora of hungry cats.

Alana had only told Jack about the incident, and of course he only saw it as a reason for Will not doing his job. He allowed Alana to take Will to a meeting on one of his days off, but apart from that, he didn't care what Will got up to in his own time, only that he was constantly churning the creaking handles of his own mind.

Will took Jack's lack of concern as an excuse to keep drinking. Arguably, the drinking made Will more efficient, so Jack had no reason to take it away from him.

Will could feel his mind wandering as he thought more and more about this killing. He tried to feel how it might've felt to kill a family member. –Not only *kill*, but *murder*.

It had felt good to fire those shots into Hobbs.

Will told himself it's because it felt 'just'. But of course, he knew that he couldn't lie to his own mind.

It felt pleasurable – *powerful.*

If killing Hobbs had felt so good, Will started to imagine what murdering Hobbs would've felt like.

"I saw you sneak away from Jack for your session with Doctor cheekbones yesterday."

Will flinched at the sudden sound of someone's voice. He looked up from his glaring screen to see Beverly in front of his desk. She had a sly look on her face, as if she thought she'd figured something out.

Will pushed his chair from his desk and leaned back into it in an attempt to seem relaxed, surprising himself at how badly his back had been bent over. He nodded and hummed. "I ended up making it through a full session, which is a first."

Beverly chuckled. "No surprise there. Maybe your problem wasn't the therapy, but the therapist. Specifically the therapist's looks." She smiled at her own joke. "But that's good to hear, how'd it go?"

Will found himself unable to stop the small smile on his face. He avoided Beverly's gaze in hopes of saving his dignity. "Really good, actually. It was like talking to an actual human rather than a psychiatrist. He declared me mentally sane, then invited me over for dinner."

Beverly's jaw hung open as she stared at the smug looking man in front of her. "Oh my god, Will!" She exclaimed excitedly. "How was it? Was his house big? Is he really *that* rich? Was he a good cook– Alana is always talking about his fancy dinner parties– oh my– did you meet his wife?"

Will almost wanted to jump in and correct her by mentioning how Hannibal wasn't actually in a relationship, however quickly decided against it. He didn't enjoy hearing people imply that Hannibal was in any sort of relationship, whether it was true or not. Will almost felt stupid feeling such jealousy, but he'd learnt to only be ashamed of the things he said out loud. His thoughts were for himself, nobody but his own mind needed to be bothered by them.

Before she could spill another question, he quickly spoke up to stop her. "Tonight."

Beverly looked at Will, confused.

"*Tonight,* he invited me for dinner tonight."

Beverly quickly understood the situation, making an 'Oh' shape with her mouth. "What time are you supposed to be there? It's a pretty long drive to Baltimore."

"He told me to get there for four. It's about a two hour drive, so I'll leave soon."

The shocked expression returned to Beverly's face. "He invited you for *dinner*, and he wants you there at four?" She pondered to herself. "God, Will. Maybe he wants a threesome with you." She said casually.

Will practically choked on the saliva in his mouth. He knew that there was no way that Beverly knew anything about their slightly *more personal* relationship, as well as Will's late night activities. But still, he couldn't help but feel a little panicked from her teasing.

"Well if Hannibal and his wife invite me to help them spice things up, you'll be the first and only person I'll ever tell."

Beverly's mouth hung open with surprise. "And now you're on a first name basis. I'll be waiting for my text about that threesome. I sleep late so don't be afraid to let me know as soon as it's over."

Will rolled his eyes in amusement. "There won't be any threesomes to text about."

And with that, with the worst timing Will had ever seen, Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller walked into the room.

"What's this about threesomes, and how can I get involved?" Jimmy asked as they both made their way over to join Beverly around Will's desk.

Beverly was quick to turn and answer. "Will's been invited to bang Lecter and his wife." She said with all seriousness.

Jimmy nodded, taking in the information as if someone was telling him the weather forecast.

Brian folded his arms over himself. "What about your Lithuanian sweetheart, Will? Haven't you heard from her recently?" He asked teasingly.

Beverly rolled her eyes. "Well *clearly* fate has a different path for Will. And clearly you're just jealous you're not the one who gets to dance it up in bed with Lecter and his supermodel

wife."

Brian clearly hadn't been listening, toning Beverly out as he stared off into the blank wall behind her. "I dated a Lithuanian girl in high school. Even attempted to learn the language for her."

"Oh yeah, and how'd that go?" Katz asked, tone riddled with sarcasm.

"Turned out she liked to talk about me in Lithuanian to her friends. Found out the hard way that I was not the only guy who she liked to take under the bleachers."

Beverly failed to stifle a laugh. "Deserved." She said under a fake cough.

Brian was about to retaliate, until Jimmy Price suddenly spoke up. "Wait– so, how come Will gets to bang Doctor Lecter and I don't?" He asked, genuinely seeming confused at the whole situation.

Will wore the exact same look of confusion on his face as he watched the entire ordeal go down. He decided it was best to wait for everyone to have it out, then explain his side.

Beverly was quick to move on from Brian's pathetic high school heartbreak to answer Jimmy. "Will is invited to Lecter's house for dinner." She paused, clearly for added dramatic effect. "At *four*."

Jimmy nodded and smiled knowingly. "Ah, the old *dinner at four* ay?"

The three scientists nodded and smiled at eachother.

Watching them all look at one another as if they'd finally discovered the clue to some sort of treasure, Will finally decided it was his turn to speak. He couldn't stand watching the three of them talk about him as if he wasn't sitting in front of them all.

"I'm not having a threesome with Doctor Lecter. He wants me to get there earlier because I decided to cut our session short yesterday. And since Jack has me on a fairly unpredictable schedule, we decided it's best to talk whenever we're both available." He spoke quickly, his tongue sharp with irritance. "Lecter is my unofficial psychiatrist, and I'm his unofficial patient. Nothing less, nothing more."

The words felt so wrong as they tumbled out of Will's mouth. It didn't feel wrong because he was lying to his friends, it felt wrong because he was lying about Hannibal. He didn't want to convince himself that they were just 'colleagues'.

Hannibal had invited Will to his house for dinner. He'd suggested to be there early because Hannibal liked to converse whilst preparing food, he always had.

They were *friends.*

More than psychiatrist and patient, but not more than friends. And for now, that was just fine.

The three adults stopped arguing over each other as they listened silently to Will. Their faces all matched ones of small children who'd just been caught doing something they were specifically told not to do.

It almost made Will laugh. He wasn't annoyed at people claiming that his dinner plans were actually a secret code for having a threesome with Hannibal. He just felt anxious. Everyone finding out about Will's century-old crush on the older man could really take a toll on him. Not only would it ruin Will's reputation for good, but also Hannibal's.

Will didn't want people knowing about their pre-existing relationship, let alone how personal it truly had been.

Once again, almost as if Will's life was some sitcom, walked in a perfectly timed Doctor Lecter.

Will was facing the door, unlike the other three in the room, so he was the first to see Hannibal.

The Doctor was wearing his usual attire of a flashy suit. His colours today were a little toned down - navy plaid, with a flash of yellow in his pocket square.

On instinct, Will quickly stood up from his flimsy desk chair, a warm small instantly gracing his face at the sight of the older man.

The three agents quickly turned to Will, stopping their muttering to watch his unexpected movement.

Will rarely changed his expression from anything other than 'tired and irritated', so to see the man smile was a very rare occurrence.

Will's feet took on a mind of their own, bringing him over to meet the older man in the middle of the room.

"Doctor Lecter." He forced out, managing not to address him by his first name. The words seemed almost foreign on his tongue, like they weren't quite fitted to his mouth.

They both stopped in the middle of the office, staring warmly at one another as if nobody else existed.

It came as a feeling that Will hadn't ever realised he missed. Even in a room filled with people, if Hannibal was there, it was as if they were the only two alive.

"Will." Hannibal breathed out. "I came to collect you, my dear."

Not even registering the added endearment, Will looked at Hannibal with curiosity. "I was just about to leave. You didn't need to drive here yourself."

Hannibal smiled, licking his bottom lip before he spoke again. "You seemed tired yesterday, I didn't want you to risk an unsafe journey. Sleep depravity can be almost as dangerous as

drunkenness." He nodded over to Will's desk. "Please, collect your coat and we'll be out of here."

Will knew he hadn't been left any room to argue, Hannibal was clearly set on something and there was no point trying to go against it. He turned around to walk back to his desk.

A warm hand lightly touched the small of Will's lower back, guiding him from behind as he walked. Will did register the intimate touch, however it felt so familiar, and so comforting that he didn't feel any need to usher it away.

The touch left Will's body as he reached for his coat. Hannibal still stood practically on top of him, watching carefully as Will fumbled his things together.

Finally managing to tear his eyes away from Will's form, Hannibal turned to the silent group of agents watching him. "Miss Katz. Mister Price and Zeller. How rude of me, it's wonderful to see you again. I hope you're all in good health since we last met?"

The group nodded silently, with Brian managing to shake out a small, "Yeah, thank you."

With the awkward greeting out of the way, Hannibal averted his eyes quickly back to Will. He watched closely at the younger man's form as he bent down to shove a laptop into a bag. The curvature of the younger man's thighs were ones of beauty. The sort you'd see carved into marble.

Hannibal wondered how they'd mould in his hands. Would the flesh be firm or plush under his touch? Would his thighs shake and tremble after being used in the same position over and over again? How would they look straddled over Hannibal's own?

All these questions flooded his mind like an unexpected Hurricane, and still, Hannibal's face stayed completely still. He kept his expression stern, yet, not angry. A small smile even tugged at his lips, giving a sort of half-pleased look to his sharp features.

Will finally turned to face Hannibal, laptop bag slung over his shoulder and his coat in one hand. He took one last sip of his drink before screwing the lid back on and slipping it into his bag.

Hannibal's smile grew wider as he met Will's eyes. "Ready?" He asked.

Will took a quick glance around the area before nodding at the older man. "All set."

Hannibal nodded back at him before wavering his arm towards the door, initiating for Will to go ahead.

Will instantly recognised the notion, walking ahead, only to stop a few seconds later in the middle of the room. He turned back to face Beverly and the two other agents. He pondered his words for a second, as if trying to remember something. "Where and what is it that Jack wants me for tomorrow?"

Beverly looked as if she'd just been caught staring at something she shouldn't have. "There was another Lost Boys murder. I'll text you the address, just be there before twelve." She

spoke urgently and out of her usual speech pattern. The look on her face clearly implied she wanted to say something else, probably unrelated, however was holding it back for some reason.

Will took no notice. He understood Hannibal's presence could be bold and easily put others on edge, so he had gotten used to people changing their act as soon as the older man walked in.

He nodded with understanding and turned back to Hannibal, only to discover that the taller man's gaze was already set upon him. Will smiled at him before turning back to the door. He knew that Hannibal would follow closely behind, like a needy cat or a well-trained dog.

The two men walked through the hallways of the academy side by side, their touch occasionally grazing each other. Neither one of them bothered to acknowledge these small gestures. There was no need. It was all so familiar, all so common and ordinary.

Will spotted the black glint of Hannibal's Bentley from across the FBI parking lot. He glanced over to where his own car was parked, almost embarrassed to look in its direction.

Suddenly coming to a realisation, Will stopped in front of Hannibal's car. "What about my car?"

Hannibal made his own way around to the driver's side. "You won't be able to drive yourself home if we're planning on drinking tonight. So you can either stay at my house for the night, or I can call someone to take you home. Your car wouldn't be needed anyway." He unlocked the doors, climbing into the seat himself.

Will followed, opening the passenger door and sliding in. He wore a face of confusion. There were too many holes in Hannibal's reasoning, it was clear that he was trying to get at something here.

"You don't want me driving at all, do you. Why?" Will asked bluntly.

Hannibal didn't make a move to start the engine up. Instead, he looked over to face the younger man beside him. "You've been drinking." He answered with the same bluntness Will had initially offered him.

Will desperately tried not to make any face of embarrassment or surprise. The car was silent. Will couldn't bring himself to meet Hannibal's eyes, so he stared straight ahead.

He'd been getting away with this method of coping through the work day for at least a few years now. It was much less common for him to be sober than to not be. And of course, after all these years of deceiving everyone, Hannibal Lecter had been the one to appear and figure everything out.

The younger man looked down at the bag on his lap, fumbling with the fraying straps with his fingers. "What gave it away?" He finally said.

“Nothing external of course. It’s no surprise that nobody has caught on yet.” Hannibal took a deep breath in through his nose. “I can smell it.” He deadpanned.

Will sighed, burying his face into his hands. “Of course you can.” His words were muffled slightly with the barrier of flesh. He took his hands away, blinking profusely as his eyes adjusted to the bright sunlight reflecting off the windshield. “You could probably smell it as you entered the building.” He muttered.

Hannibal breathed out a small hum of amusement. “Not quite. Although, I did recognize that terrible aftershave when we met in Jack Crawford’s office.” This comment perked Will back up. He quickly turned to face Hannibal, suddenly finding interest in the conversation, as well as feeling a little relieved at the quick subject change.

Hannibal continued, “I grasped a hint of the scent just before you walked in. And from the moment a had held onto that, it was like desperately savouring the last bites of a perfect meal, all whilst hoping for a second course to come.”

Will smiled, finding that he had missed being spoken to in metaphors than actual words. He scanned Hannibal’s face, watching as the older man matched his expression. “I thought you were at least going to wine and dine me before trying to get me into your bed, Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal’s expression faltered at the sudden boldness from Will. Although, he was quickly able to slip his stern facade back on with the brush of assuming Will’s words to be a joke.

“Very well, Agent Graham.” He started the engine, the sound of Will’s laughter echoed through the stone walls of his vast mind palace.

The journey from Quantico to Baltimore was two hours, which was partly the reason that Will would’ve initially preferred to make the drive alone. However, if there was anybody he wouldn’t mind being trapped in a small moving box with, it would be Hannibal, which was lucky.

The first quarter of the journey had been spent by Will explaining his current case to Hannibal. He complained about Jack’s weird obsession, and how there was no way he was going to let Will rest until everything was over. He complained about how the case was really not as complicated as everyone was making it out to be, but there was no way for Will to explain that to the average person without getting sent to the BSHCI.

And to all of this, Hannibal simply listened. He occasionally gave his input, either agreeing with Will or suggesting a way to solve a problem, and even sometimes giving his own opinion and theory on the case.

Mid-complain about an old case that Will had been forced to work on he suddenly said, “-- And then of course Freddie Lounds- oh, Freddie Lounds, do you know who that woman is?”

Hannibal was grinning as he looked at the road ahead, finding Will's constant rambling both amusing and charming. "I'm familiar with her work."

Will nodded quickly. "Yeah, well you'll know that she's a right-" He stopped suddenly, coming to a realisation as Hannibal's response set in. "You're familiar with her work?"

"I am."

"How familiar?" Will asked suspiciously.

"I occasionally read her articles when they catch my eye."

"And how long have you been reading these articles?"

Hannibal smirked, quickly glancing in Will's direction with that smug look on his face. "Why do you think I began profiling for the FBI, my sweet William? Do you really believe I was aiding Jack Crawford with the kindness of my own heart?"

Will practically snorted. "No, of course not. You're a dick, there's no way you'd just help someone as rude as Crawford."

Hannibal didn't say anything, he only smiled at the charmingness of Will's uncalled rudeness.

Will watched the older man intently, trying to watch his face for any giveaways. "You started helping the FBI because you saw a TattleCrime article about me?" He asked with disbelief.

Hannibal just stared straight ahead, pretending to concentrate on driving. However, the unconcealed grin on his face really gave it all away.

Will's mouth hung open with amazement. "I can't believe you. All that time I spent on that damn Buffalo Bill case and you could've just showed up?" His voice was starting to raise slightly now, as well as a tinge of anger creeping up on it.

"I couldn't exactly *just show up,* but yes, I was aware of your involvement with the case during that time." Hannibal's tone wasn't at all defensive. He was keeping calm.

Will, on the other hand, was not. "Bullshit." He hissed. "You know damn well that with your sort of status they'd practically put down a carpet for you to walk on if you ever wanted in on a crime scene."

"I am here now."

"The FBI aren't considering putting me in a care home *now*. I'm not being forced to eat and sleep under the watch of a team of doctors *now*." Will ran his palms over his face, pushing his palms into the sockets of his eyes. He could feel the tears trying to break through. "I could've used some help, you know? I thought I *had* to do it all alone."

The warm touch of skin abruptly fell over Will's hand, gripping his palm and pulling it away from his face.

Hannibal's grasp remained, resting their hands on Will's thigh.

Will felt a little sheepish from his sudden outburst. There was still a part of him that the anger was still simmering in, however, the heat had been brought down many counts by the small gesture of touch.

He hated how easily Hannibal could switch his emotions, how easily his perspective could change all from a small caress. It made him feel less in control - like somebody else had charge over *his* emotions.

The word *sorry* hung in the air. Unneeded to be spoken out loud by Will.

Over their time spent together, the two men had figured out ways that they could communicate without speaking. Obviously, not through their minds - Will was en *empath,* not a *telepath.*

These communications could be through facial expressions, small gestures that the average eye wouldn't pick up on, or sometimes through touch.

Right now, through touch, Will knew that Hannibal was saying something to him - letting him know that it was okay. Everything was fine, and that there was no need for either of them to say anything. All that needed to be said, had been spoken.

Will bit his lip, taking a deep sigh through his nose. He turned his head to his window, leaning his cheek on the headrest of his seat. The hand that wasn't intertwined with Hannibal's rested absently on his right leg.

"I just– Maybe- maybe I would've been able to save myself if there had been someone with me." He forced out.

The car came to a stop at a red light, and Hannibal took this small intermission to fully submerge himself with the presence of Will Graham. He drank in the sight of the man next to him - the way his prominent jawline was accentuated with the tilt of his head. The way his scruffy curls fell faultlessly over his tired, blue eyes. *Oh, those eyes.* Hannibal had dreamt of them, seeing the elegant shade of blue staring right back at him whenever he closed his eyes.

Will Graham was effortlessly beautiful. A picturesque statue, carved by the Gods.

Hannibal imagined what the younger man would look like if he was taken care of. Hopefully, it would soon become something he wouldn't have to imagine. He would take such good care of Will -- hand feeding him home-cooked meals, bathing him with his own hands. He'd buy Will an entirely new closet, hand picking every item of clothing, as well as having it all tailored to fit the younger man's slim, but still stunningly muscular frame.

If it went Hannibal's way, Will wouldn't be able to go through a single day of his life without having to rely on Hannibal. His whole routine would be based around the help of the older man.

However, Hannibal still wanted Will to remain happy. He wanted Will to live a life where he felt most comfortable. *That had always been the priority.*

Meaning, if it meant for Hannibal to cut himself out of Will's life just for the happiness of the younger man, then he'd remove all contact and ship himself off to Italy.

The sound of a car horn from behind caused Hannibal to tear his gaze off of Will and back to the road.

"I drove to your house once."

The sudden claim had Will straighten himself back up, as well as tighten the grip he still had on Hannibal's hand.

Hearing no response, Hannibal continued. "I didn't get out of my car. I just sat there, staring into the dark windows of the front of the house. For some reason, I couldn't bring myself to get any closer." He paused. "I was afraid."

Will gave a hum of amusement. "Were you scared of me or the cats? Because if it was the cats, I don't blame you - Buster has got a real bite to him."

"I can't tell you what it was that I was afraid of, as I'm not sure of it myself."

A pause.

"You were scared I'd reject you."

It was asked as a question, but also said as a statement.

"Yes."

Will finally turned his head to look at Hannibal. He covered their hands with the grasp of his other one, running his index finger and thumb over the soft skin of Hannibal's hand.

"I wouldn't have. I wouldn't be able to do that to myself, not again."

"It seems we've both made decisions we aren't proud of. Tell me Will, if time could reverse, would you change it all?" He turned to glance at Will, eyes smiling as he realised the younger man's gaze was already set on him.

Will shook his head. "I had a pretty interesting conversation with Beverly and the others the other day. I think you would've liked it."

"Oh? Do tell me about it."

"It was about fate. And how everything fell into place eventually. I think that maybe, if we hadn't left each other all those years ago, we might not be talking together right now."

"Romeo and Juliet may have never met if it weren't for them being from opposing families. Fate can work in mysterious ways."

“I hope fate doesn’t have the same plans for us as she did with Romeo and Juliet. I’m not sure a double suicide would really be the best end for me.” Will looked to the road ahead, before quickly adding an afterthought. “Or maybe it would be. I guess we won’t know until we get there.”

“A double suicide is arguably better than just suicide. We barely survived our last separation. I don’t think I’d be able to go on knowing there's no chance of us meeting again.”

“Are you asking me to make a suicide pact with you?” Will asked teasingly.

Hannibal paused in consideration for a moment. “I thought that was already agreed on?” He shot back, with the same joking tone.

“Yeah, yeah okay. I’ll hang myself if you do. Want me to slit my palms open and shake on it?”

“That would be ideal, yes.”

“It’s not urgent right? I’ll just do it when we get to yours.”

“I’ll find my sharpest knife. There's a particular one I’ve found that glides through flesh like *butter*.”

Will couldn’t help but laugh. “Christ, you’re sick.” He managed through a fit of giggles, his Cajun accent suddenly slipping through the usual barrier he created.

Hannibal grinned. He would never get tired of making jokes for himself. He hoped he’d be able to share them with Will one day, that they’d be able to smirk at each other - being the only two in a room to be in on the punchline.

“Well it’s good to know you don’t think I’ve changed much. I could say the same about you.”

Will scrunched his nose. “You think?” He asked, genuinely curious.

Hannibal smiled and nodded. “It’s as if the same boy I met in the winter of 1991 is sitting right next to me once again.”

“Ha-ha.” Will said sarcastically. “Jokes on you, because I have shorter hair and six cats now. I’m a changed man.”

Hannibal gave a non-committal hum. He turned to face Will, taking his hand away from the other man’s. Reaching up to Will’s face, Hannibal ran his hand through the brunette locks of Will’s unruly hair.

“Perhaps you should grow it out again. Long hair truly does frame your face beautifully.”

Will’s face instantly blushed a warm shade of pink, which quickly spread to his ears. He really was considering growing his hair out now. Usually he’d be able to hide the blush behind those unkempt strands.

Hannibal suddenly caught sight of a familiar mark. The scar on Will's neck had faded ever so slightly over time, however was still noticeable from a close proximity. He was still curious about its origins, and wondered if he'd manage to get an answer from Will any time soon.

Will reached up to grab Hannibal's hand, bringing it back down to rest on his thigh again. "Eyes on the road, old man."

Hannibal tutted, shaking his head. "How rude."

Will could only smile.

Their eyes stayed wedded for a few counts longer before Hannibal regrettably tore his focus back to driving.

-Espoir-

For the rest of the drive, Hannibal's hand remained locked with Will's for as often as it could. He occasionally had to break their seal, however it was twined back together as quickly as possible.

The car was filled with a comfortable conversation about whatever crossed their minds.

Soon enough, two hours had passed and Hannibal was finally pulling into the driveway of his home.

"Wow." Will said, almost under his breath as he got out the vehicle. There was a small stone path leading up to the front door, which both men walked side by side on. "I was sort of picturing a castle but this will do."

Hannibal reached to unlock the door, smiling at Will's comment. "Then I shall find some time to visit my childhood home in Lithuania with you. I'm sure it'll be much more up to your standards."

"You grew up in a castle?"

"Castle Lecter, Dvaras. It's belonged to my family for centuries, though I believe it belongs to me now." Hannibal pushed the door open, stepping aside to allow Will to walk in first.

Will stepped through the door, walking into the entrance hallway of Hannibal's home. He inhaled the scent of the air, finding comfort in the long lost familiarity.

Hannibal offered a hand, gesturing towards the jacket that Will was carrying. "May I?" He asked.

Will nodded, smoothly handing the item of clothing over to Hannibal and watching him hang on a wooden coat stand by the door.

“You really haven’t changed at all, have you?” He said as he looked around at the dark, gothic aesthetic of the place.

Hannibal hung his keys up on a small brass hook. “It’s the way my aunt used to enjoy decorating the castle. It seems I somehow inherited her impeccable taste.” He began walking towards the kitchen.

Will followed, walking slowly behind as he looked around at the antique furniture that decorated every crevice in a very pleasing way.

“Well I’ll let you know when I’m free for a quick trip to Lithuania.” Will joked as he entered the kitchen behind Hannibal.

Hannibal took off his blazer, folding it up and placing it on a wooden table that was pressed against the wall. “I’ll write it in my calendar as soon as possible.”

Will didn’t even realise he was moving with instinct as he sat down on a stool, facing Hannibal.

The kitchen was a very similar, almost identical version to the one Will remembered in the penthouse. Steel counters, a huge fridge, cabinets covering the walls and an island in the centre of the room, where Will sat.

He’d always done the same thing whenever Hannibal had invited him over for a meal. Will had sat down and watched for the majority of it, occasionally getting up to help or simply pace around the room for a couple minutes.

“Whiskey, I assume?” Hannibal had disappeared into the pantry, only to come back holding a bottle of Jack Daniel’s and some fancy looking wine.

Will smiled and nodded. “You buy that especially for me? I can’t imagine you having a quick sip of Jack Daniel’s to cool yourself off.”

Hannibal slid a small glass tumbler with some ice in it, as well as the bottle over to Will. The older man poured his own glass, which he took occasional sips of as he began to prepare the food.

“I will admit that I kept a spare bottle for emergencies as such.”

“Keeping a bottle of my favourite alcohol just in case I happened to swing by, *and* getting a job with Jack Crawford just for the chance to work with me. You do know the FBI has a whole department for stalking, right?”

Hannibal undid the buttons on his sleeve cuffs, then rolled them up to reveal his forearms. Will didn’t bother to even attempt to hide his gaze. He hadn’t had a view like this in nearly two decades, he was deprived. Hannibal’s arms were thicker than Will remembered. It seemed he’d only built more muscle since the last viewing.

“You’re free to put in a complaint, however I can’t assure you that it’ll actually end up anywhere.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “Stalking *and* fraud? I guess you have changed after all, Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal’s adam’s apple bobbed in his throat, caught like a trapped mouse. “Perhaps I have.” Was all he managed out.

A comfortable silence fell over the room. Will sipped on his drink whilst watching Hannibal grind his palm into some sort of meat. He couldn’t help put lick his lips as he watched the way the older man put all his weight into the gesture, the muscles in his arms and back flexing with each grind.

Will finished what he had previously poured into his glass, so he reached for round two.

“What are you making tonight?” He asked.

“Kudal. It’s a South Indian curry dish-”

“--Made with lamb intestine.” Will finished Hannibal’s sentence for him. Hannibal stopped what he was doing and turned to face Will. “It was the first thing you ever served me. Just a day after we met. Fuck, Hannibal. Did you plan this?” Will suddenly felt a heap of emotions run over him.

Hannibal didn’t say anything. He simply watched Will, examining the way the younger man’s blue eyes ran miles around his own face.

“Usually,” Hannibal took a few steps over to Will, placing his glass down on the counter in front. “I would serve this dish with wine.”

Will shook his head. “I’ve never enjoyed wine if I’m being honest with you.”

Hannibal’s sharp canines lapped over his lips as he smiled. “That’s because you’ve never enjoyed it *properly.*”

He lifted his own glass and handed it to Will. Will took the glass, looking suspiciously at Hannibal, waiting for whatever he was about to say next.

“First, smell.” Will followed the orders of the deep, accented voice. Finding no other choice but to do exactly what he was told.

Hannibal carried on, gazing intently as he watched. “Then, a small sip. But don’t swallow, hold it in your mouth.” Will obliged, bringing the half-drank glass to his lips. “Move it over your tongue, I want you to bathe every taste bud.”

And bathe every taste bud he did. The cold beverage folded over his tongue, creating waves of sweet red in his mouth.

Will offered a small smile, finding the watchful eyes of his friend almost intimidating.

“Good, now–” Hannibal said. He waited for Will to meet his eyes before finally saying. “*Swallow.*”

If the accented drawl of Hannibal's voice hadn't calmed him so much, Will might've spat out the liquid in his mouth rather than swallowing.

It had all felt so sensual. From the quiet, almost whispery way Hannibal had ordered him around. To the way the older man had looked down on Will as he told him to swallow.

Will fought back a sense of arousal that was slowly drifting up to meet him. A hot pool of tightness was building in his stomach, and it wasn't hunger - at least, not for food.

He swallowed the cold liquid, feeling the burning coolness as it hit the back of his throat.

Hannibal was now leant over slightly, his body bent to be on Will's eye-level. "Very good, Mylimasis." He said softly, as if he was just thinking out loud. He watched as Will pulled the glass from his face, and how the red stain of the liquid pulled a beautiful crimson colour to the inside of Will's lips. Hannibal had to abstain from reaching over the counter and licking the remaining flavour off.

With Hannibal's low voice snapping Will back to reality, he suddenly remembered he had to actually function when around other people.

He placed the glass onto the steel counter, sliding it towards the man in front of him.

Will shook his head. "Still disgusting." He said, the grimace on his face present in his voice.

Hannibal took the glass back in his own hand, staring at the liquid as he swirled it around the edges of the glass. He brought it to his lips, taking care to place his own in the same place as Will's. He made sure to keep his eyes open, watching the younger man as their eyes met in silence.

"You'll learn to enjoy it." Hannibal shrugged, moving back to the counters behind him to carry on working on the food. "Is whiskey always your chosen drink?" He asked casually as he lifted a knife to begin chopping up something.

Will had to stop himself from rolling his eyes. "Is this your way of starting the *'are you an alcoholic'* conversation?"

"It seems I've forgotten that you prefer directness rather than dancing around the point."

Will hummed.

"Are you an alcoholic?" Hannibal asked, no sense of judgement in his tone.

Will also kept a calm voice to his own answer. "I wouldn't want to deprive you of material for our next session. I would like to talk to Hannibal right now, not Doctor Lecter."

"Very well then. We can have a conversation between Hannibal and Will, rather than Doctor Lecter and Agent Graham if that's what you'd prefer."

"Thank you." Will said quietly, his sibilant words ever so soft.

“That means the questions I ask will be off the record, as well as your answers. No need to report back to Jack Crawford on a conversation between friends.”

“What sort of *off the record* questions are you planning on asking me?”

Hannibal paused, stopping his cutting, however he kept his eyes on the chopped vegetables in front of him.

Will watched him in silence, taking another sip from his drink as he waited patiently for an answer.

“That scar - just below your ear - how did you get it?”

“Line of duty. Just a deep scratch from when I was an officer.” Will answered quickly but calmly, as if he had rehearsed it thousands of times.

Hannibal turned to face Will. “That’s what you’ve learnt to tell people.” Hannibal gave the same cool tone. “Remember my dear, off the record.”

Will held his glass mid-air, as if he’d just been caught, or remembered something important. He didn’t say anything, so Hannibal continued.

“I have a faint memory of seeing that mark many years ago. I don’t believe joining the police force was even a consideration back then.”

Hannibal took Will's silence as a chance to continue.

“Do not feel pressured to give me an answer right now. However I feel as if my curiosity should be satisfied one day.”

“No, no it's fine.” Will let out a sigh along with an awkward chuckle. “I just-, Christ, it makes me feel sick thinking about how much you remember.”

“It does?” Hannibal sounded like he was starting to speak his thoughts again, forgetting to zip the final part of his person suit up.

“But I also can’t help but feel disgustingly happy knowing that you remembered all the small details.”

Hannibal stood still for a moment, before placing the knife down on the counter. He moved over to the sink, still not saying a word, and washed off his hands. Not bothering to dry off, he then walked out the kitchen.

Will had a sudden jolt of worry crash through him. *Had he said something? Was Hannibal annoyed that he wouldn’t share something a little personal?* For all Hannibal had ever done for him, Will suddenly realised he’d never really done anything in return. The least he could do right now was give him a quick story.

Hannibal returned half a minute later, only now he was clutching something in one hand. He walked over to Will, facing opposite him.

Before Will could figure out what the older man had brought back, the small object was placed in front of him.

“Do you remember this?” Hannibal finally asked.

In front of Will, was a small, metal stag ornament. The edges of its antlers were now starting to fade with their metallic colour, along with the edges of its brassy fur.

Will picked it up, running his fingers over the faded parts of the small animal statue.

“Why did you keep it?” He asked, not taking his eyes off the thing.

Hannibal’s smile was present in his voice as he watched Will. “So I could do that one day.”

“You kept it, in the hopes that one day you’d be able to show me that you kept it?” Will asked, finding the whole ordeal a little amusing, but also terribly sweet.

Hannibal sighed, he couldn’t help but feel a small amount of embarrassment at Will’s reaction. “Yes.”

Will’s smile faded slowly. He had both hands on the small stag statue, still running his fingers over the smooth finish. He reached for the glasses on his face, taking them off and slipping the folded pair onto the counter.

“It was my Dad, obviously. You probably expected that.”

Hannibal looked down at his own hands for a split second, then back to Will. He was suddenly filled with such happiness at the thought of his dear being comfortable to share what he must consider such an intimate story.

He nodded glumly, not replying in any words.

Will carried on in a solemn, but also awkwardly cheery tone. “I must’ve been about fifteen or sixteen, it doesn’t matter. Old man didn’t like my new piercings, long hair, or the attitude I’d developed as I grew into being a teenager. When I told him I wasn’t planning to lose any of it, he didn’t take it too lightly. Called me trixie and a fag of course.” Will paused, his tongue clicking as he debated carrying on or not. He looked up to Hannibal, eyes shaking as their gaze met.

Hannibal nodded at him comfortingly, telling him to carry on.

Will gave a small nod back, then looked back down at his hands. “He turned the stove on, pushed the back of my head down to it, and didn’t bring me back up until I agreed to cut my hair and take the jewellery out.” He gave out a small scoff. “I buzzed it all after that. Walking around with half-singed hair wasn’t exactly the best look for me.”

Will then suddenly turned his head and pulled down the top of his ear, revealing the back of it. “It was probably the first time my Dad had ever turned a stove on for anything other than lighting a cigarette, so it barely caught my skin.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly to get a better look at what Will was showing to him. A small part, at the top of Will's ear, was singed. The tight skin was white with scar tissue, crumpled and painted.

Hannibal thought out his next words carefully, erasing and rewriting sentences in his mind before finally saying one out loud.

"Is your Father still alive?"

"From what I know, he isn't dead."

"A shame."

"Tell me about it."

"Do you often fantasise about killing your Father?"

"I'm not talking to you right now, Doctor Lecter. I was talking to Hannibal."

Hannibal smiled fondly at Will's sharp mind and tongue. "Very well."

Their conversation carried on through the evening, meaningless thoughts and words being thrown around as Will watched Hannibal cook.

Eventually, Hannibal led Will to his dining room and asked him to wait whilst he served the food.

The large table had two places set, each facing opposite the other. It was all beautifully decorated, with a sculpture on the centre of the table made from animal bones.

A garland of herbs and plants ran through the middle, along with some candles, creating a comfortingly warm environment, even with the navy walls and darkening sky beside Will.

Soon enough, Hannibal joined him. He set down Will's food in front of him, as well as a new bottle of whiskey - seeing how Will had finished the last one in just a few hours.

Hannibal sat opposite Will, their eyes in the perfect place to match gazes.

"Bon appetit." Hannibal said, the crisp sounds of his mouth making Will feel suddenly flushed.

"Thank you."

They both began to eat, conversation wavering casually through the air.

Will went to take a sip from his glass, but stopped it before the liquid reached his lips. "I fear I've drank too much before the evening has properly started."

“The evening started as soon as you got here. Although, I hope you don’t mind me saying, but you’ve never been one to easily hold your alcohol. It has me wondering what you drink throughout the day.”

“Same as always, I just pace myself a little better. A drink a day keeps the voices away.” Will smiled at his own comment.

“I’m not quite sure that’s the saying.” Hannibal replied before taking another bite of his food.

“Well it certainly didn’t keep the Doctor away, I’ll tell you that much.”

“No, no it did not.”

Hannibal kept his eyes strictly on Will as he watched the younger man take a bite of his meal. He held it in his mouth, the same way he did with the wine, and savoured every part of the bite. Hannibal wondered how it would feel to have Will’s velvet tongue in his own mouth, how it would feel to intertwine his own with Will’s.

He watched closely as Will’s lips moved as he began to chew. They were dry, with small cuts covering the peeling skin. Hannibal crossed it off as another small task to take care of. Perhaps he’d introduce Will to some vaseline, then demonstrate with his own fingers how to cover his lips with it.

“I don’t want to go to work tomorrow.” Will suddenly said, out of nowhere.

Hannibal swiftly collected himself before answering. “Are there days where you *do* want to go in?”

“No, of course not. But I just know that tomorrow will be especially bad.”

“Tomorrow is a Saturday. Surely there are no classes to teach on weekends.”

“Weekends don’t stop Jack Crawford from dragging you halfway across the country.”

“For a crime scene, I assume?”

“For what he *thinks* will be a crime scene. He’s going up there tonight, and told me I can meet him there tomorrow morning.”

“Is there a particular reason you don’t want to go?”

“Jack doesn’t *need* me for this kind of thing. He’s just too lazy to hire someone who will do the exact same thing, just, with a little more difficulty. It makes me feel like I’m more of a tool than an employee.”

“You’re Jack Crawford’s finest china, only he should learn to only bring this particular tea set out for special guests.”

Will let out a small laugh. “I’ll marry you the day you stop comparing me to teacups.”

Hannibal raised his eyebrows momentarily. “Consider it done.”

Both men finished their food, then washed up together, just like old times. Hannibal would do the dirty work in the sink, and Will would dry off the clean dishes before putting them away.

Will could very easily see the dishwasher amongst the counters in Hannibal’s kitchen, still, he wasn’t going to complain.

They eventually moved into what Will assumed to be the living room. The walls were papered with an intricate pattern, in an off white colour and a large fireplace decorated the room, along with the antique couch that stood in front of it.

Will sat, slightly facing the side, with his chin by his knees, on the sofa. Hannibal sat there with him, his legs crossed out in front of him.

Hannibal’s tie had gotten lost somewhere along the way, and he was now sporting a more casual look with one button open. Both men had taken off their shoes at one point, which added to the comfortable environment around them.

Their respective drinks sat on the wooden table by Hannibal’s feet, both with just a few sips left.

Hannibal had always been much better at holding a drink, however was starting to slur his words here and then. Will, had tried to pace himself, but was now stumbling over every other sentence that he said,

“You got to ask me a question, can I ask you one now?” Will asked, finding himself more focused on the grooves of Hannibal’s face than the words that came out his mouth.

“Of course, anything Mylimasis.” Hannibal smiled.

“Did you miss me?”

“Yes, sweet William. I missed you.”

“Why?” Will asked, his voice becoming slightly more monotone.

“Why did I miss you?” Hannibal repeated the question back to Will.

“Why did you miss me.” Will said it more as a statement, and less of a question.

Hannibal sighed, taking a moment to compose himself through the hazy fog of alcohol. “I found myself bored, unable to take interest in anything *or anyone.* My life returned to what it was before I met you, only, I now knew that there was someone out there who could understand me.”

“Longing for something that you know you can have is arguably worse than wanting something you can’t have. I found life becomes maddeningly polite without you.”

“I fear another separation will truly be the death of me.”

Will stood up, only to sit back down much closer to Hannibal. His legs curled up to his side and he laid his head on the older man’s shoulder.

Hannibal didn’t flinch, not wanting to move and scare Will off.

Will closed his eyes. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“I know.”

They stayed like that for what could’ve been two minutes or two hours, simply enjoying the presence and warmth of the other person.

Hannibal’s arm was strewn lightly around Will’s shoulder, his touch barely noticeable.

After realising that Will was close to falling asleep, Hannibal cycled through his options. He could either carry Will up to the guest room after letting him fall asleep, or, he could wake him up now and watch a slightly dazed-with-sleep Will Graham navigate himself around Hannibal’s house.

He weighed out the options for a second, realising that going with the latter, he could supply a change of sleepwear for Will. And well, the thought of his sweet William clad in his oversized clothes was just *too sweet* to pass up.

Hannibal tapped Will’s shoulder a few times. “Mylimasis, please, you should sleep in a bed tonight.”

Will opened his eyes, his pupils dilating as they got used to the light of the room. He mumbled something incoherent.

“It’s fine, chuck a coat on me and I’ll sleep here.” Will went to close his eyes again, however was forced to open them again at the sudden loss of warmth by his side.

Hannibal stood up in front of Will, tilting his head and lifting an eyebrow in question.

Will just leaned his head back on the backrest of the sofa as his body gave into exhaustion.

Seeing this, Hannibal decided on a whole new option entirely - a mix of the two if you will.

Leaning down, Hannibal gripped the sides of Will’s waist, feeling the slim body beneath him, before hauling Will over his shoulder as if he was weightless. He’d carried Will plenty of times before, whether it was because the younger man had fallen asleep or passed out somewhere, or because of the situation they were in right now, where Will was refusing to sleep somewhere actually comfortable.

Will let out a yelp of surprise at the sudden action. “Wait- Hannibal, don’t–”

These cries continued as Hannibal lifted him through the rooms of the house and up a staircase.

Finally, Hannibal walked into a room and switched the lights on - *Will still over his shoulder of course.* He eventually crouched down to allow Will to ground himself once again. He set the smaller man down in his guest room, which was still as beautifully decorated as any other room in the house.

“Christ, Hannibal. You can’t be doing that anymore. It was funny when we were both twenty, it won’t be funny when I’m explaining to the FBI how you broke your knee.”

“I believe my knee is still fully intact.”

“You know what I meant, old man.”

Hannibal gave that toothy grin that Will loved so much. He watched as the younger man attempted to cover both a blush and a smile.

Gesturing to folded clothes behind Will on the bed, Hannibal said, “Feel free to change into something a little more comfortable. Unfortunately, I hadn’t thought far enough ahead to purchase something your size. But I assure you, they’re clean.”

“You just wanted to see me in those ugly silk pyjamas.” Will mumbled as he trudged over to unfold the clothes.

Hannibal smirked. “Perhaps.” He contemplated something for a moment, deciding his next move. “Goodnight, Will.”

Turning back around to face him, Will locked his gaze with the other man. “Night, Hannibal.”

And with that, Will was left by himself for the night. He changed into the sleepwear that he’d been provided, smiling to himself as he took the silky fabric in between his thumb and index finger. The fabric was a deep crimson colour, and Will could imagine just how good the set would look on Hannibal.

Just as he was about to turn the lights off, Will suddenly felt a strange sense of deja vu rush over him. Then, the feeling was followed by the familiar, metallic taste of blood filling his mouth. Will licked the knuckle of his finger, however was only met with clear saliva. A rush of heat suddenly clouded his head, causing Will to grab onto the wall for stability.

Suddenly feeling panicked from the strange sensations, Will acted on his gut instinct, and made his way out the door.

He figured that the room at the end of the hallway must be Hannibal’s, so he began to walk down towards it.

His head still cloudy, Will glided his hand over the wall beside him as a last grab for something stable. However, the more he moved, the further Hannibal’s door seemed to get from him.

Falling into the wall, Will's shoulder crashed into the painted brick. "Hannibal–" He tried to call out.

Within a few seconds, the door at the end of the hallway opened to reveal a room of light, and out came a tall figure.

The figure moved with the quickness of a predator moving in on its prey.

Will moved to reach out to Hannibal, however, doing so caused a strike of pain from the scar on Will's abdomen. He flinched at the sudden stabbing sensation, screwing his eyes shut and gasping at the air around him. His hands flailed out as a reflex, desperately trying to stabilise his body.

Along with the pain in his stomach, a strict ache followed in Will's head. His eyes washed over into blackness as he tried to open them, the edges of his vision becoming static and blurry. It wasn't a new sensation, Will had felt this before - thankfully in the comfort of his own home each time. He was sure it was just a side effect of his sleeping problems, so it was ignored.

"Will?"

Someone called out to him, but it was like a small whisper out in a vast ocean.

"Will?"

The call became louder, closer.

"Will, I need you to answer me."

The deep, accented voice broke through to Will, pulling him from the prison of static blurriness.

As his vision began to fade back to him, Will's senses also returned. He could feel two hands pressed firmly on him - one placed on his shoulder, the other gripping his cheek.

"Will?" Hannibal sounded worried.

A few more moments passed, and still the hands stayed firmly gripped to Will. The only thing he could hear was the sound of his own rapid breathing.

"Mylimasis, please."

With that final plea, Will found himself falling forward. A strong force held him tightly as his legs felt numb and unstable.

Finally coming to his senses, Will realised what it was that had caught him. Hannibal clutched onto his body tightly. He took in the form of the older man. He looked divine in just a pair of black sleepwear pants.

Will was confused, it was just a bit of dizziness from sleep deprivation. Why was Hannibal being so dramatic?

Their bodies stood together, tightly conjoined with Hannibal latching onto an unsteady Will.

“Will, are you okay? I need you to speak to me.” The worry in Hannibal’s voice was now turning into fear.

Hearing this, Will suddenly realised that although his body felt paralysed, he was still free to use the muscles in his mouth.

“Yeah, Hannibal. I’m okay.” He managed to bring his head up from where it laid on Hannibal’s shoulder to meet his eyes. “I just got a little light-headed.”

“Does this happen often?” Despite Will’s explanation, his voice was still laced with worry.

Will frowned. “It’s happened a few times before. I can just walk it off though.”

Hannibal sighed and helped Will into his own room, deciding that he didn’t want to leave Will alone for the time being. The younger man leaned heavily on Hannibal, but the action didn’t seem to create any notion of discomfort or annoyance.

“This isn’t a simple case of *feeling a little dizzy.*” Hannibal helped Will to sit down on his bed, then crouched in front of him. “What you experienced there, was the beginning of a seizure.”

Will stared into Hannibal’s eyes, searching desperately for any sign of deception. “What?” Was all he could manage to muster up.

“You carry around aspirin, correct?” Hannibal’s tone was serious now. This wasn’t the same person that Will had been talking with just a few minutes ago.

Will was confused. “Yeah. I get headaches sometimes.”

“And how often do you get these headaches?”

Will was still trying to get over the fact that he’d been having seizures for the past few months. “I- I’m- I don’t know? Everyday?”

“Have you gotten a diagnosis for these headaches?”

“What? No, I just have a fucked up sleep schedule. I only get a few hours of sleep a night.”

Hannibal hummed, he was deep in thought. The hesitance only filled Will with more worry. It wasn’t like Hannibal to act like this, he was always so calm, always knew what to do.

Will scrambled what words he could find together. “How- how do I *stop* having these seizures?”

Hannibal still looked deep in thought, his gaze rested on Will's chest as he searched his own mind. "Not seizures, only the start of ones. A seizure could cause much more permanent damage."

Will raised his voice slightly. "Yeah, whatever- how do I stop myself from having one then?"

"I don't have the correct equipment to diagnose you here. You'll need to have a brain scan-"

Will quickly cut him off with stuttering words. "Is there something wrong with me- why do I need a brain scan?"

Hannibal sighed, then inhaled a long breath through his nose. "It could be something serious, however if we catch it now, it may not be fatal."

Will was silent. If it were anyone else, he'd be arguing until he ran out of breath. But he just couldn't bring himself to go against Hannibal. He was afraid. He was too scared to argue with Hannibal. *Too scared of the consequences.*

"Okay."

The air was quiet with the night.

"I'll come with you tomorrow, I'm going to call Jack Crawford now."

Will was confused. "No- what? Hannibal, you'll have to stay in some shitty motel."

"I'm worried, Will, please."

Will met Hannibal's eyes, almost scared by the expression that met him. It was one that he'd only seen a few times, once being on Hannibal's birthday.

Closing his eyes, Will nodded. "Fine. But you're driving."

Hannibal breathed a breath of amusement from his nose. "Very well."

"And, you have to wake me up tomorrow. We should leave at about nine."

"Of course. I've dealt with you many times in the morning before. What makes this time different?"

"I don't know." Will said sarcastically, clicking his tongue.

Hannibal got up from where he knelt, and Will followed, standing up and moving to leave.

"Please, if it doesn't bother you, you can sleep here tonight. It would give me comfort to know you're okay."

Will stopped, his heart racing. *Was he really about to agree to sleep next to the man he'd fingered himself to last night?*

"Christ, buy me a drink first."

“I did, if you recall.”

Yes, yes he was.

That night, Will didn’t wake up once. He fell asleep almost as soon as his head hit the pillow.

Perhaps it was something to do with the presence of another human being. Or perhaps the presence of a *certain* human being.

Either way, Will wasn’t too bothered at looking into the science of it.

Chapter End Notes

The longest chapter yet - standing at 10.8k words!!

I just found out that Mads and Hugh are doing a Hannibal reunion panel at Chicago comic con and I've never hated living in England more than I do right now. The only convention close to me is London MCM, which, in all fairness isn't that bad, but compared to guests that American cons get, is pretty awful in comparison.

I'm actually going to London MCM in May, so if you're going look out for someone dressed as wedding night Xie Lian!!!

Aaaaaand for the stats of this chapter - the word Hannibal is said 154 times, taking up 6% of the entire chapter.

Thank you so much for 10k hits as well! This is my first time writing on Ao3, and I didn't expect people to actually read my work, so it makes me insanely happy to think about how many people are enjoying it so far.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will awoke to a foreign view. The space around him was somewhere he'd never woken up in before. He'd found himself waking up in his bathroom, outside his house, and sometimes in the middle of his kitchen. However, this clearly wasn't just a case of drunken sleepwalking. And if it was, there was a whole new issue at hand.

Memories of the previous evening flooded back to him as he pulled himself up into a sitting position.

He sat in the middle of what had to be some sort of super king-size bed. The bedsheets were made of soft, cool fabrics, that Will didn't even want to guess the prices of. There was only one person he knew that would dare to spend such a copious amount on something so simple.

Will had slept in Hannibal's bed.

He instinctively reached over to the empty side of the bed, feeling his hand over the soft silk of the sheets.

It still had a small hue of warmth, meaning Hannibal hadn't been up for long.

Although Will would've much preferred to wake up to the sight of Hannibal next to him, the thought of facing the other man seemed like the worst possible option right now.

With the memories of yesterday coming back, Will couldn't help but blush just thinking about it. He'd let Hannibal carry him up the stairs, then practically collapsed into him straight after, only to barge into his room and then take up the middle of his bed.

Not only that, but as the glint of crimson red managed its way into his eyeline, Will realised his attire. He was in Hannibal's clothes. With the older man having a slightly taller, and more broad frame, the sleeves were a baggy fit - coming down to rest at Will's fingertips.

He glanced around the dim room, making sure to check he was *really* alone. Will hooked two fingers around the collar of the silk shirt, only to bring the fabric up to his face. He inhaled deeply, almost casting himself into a trance at the way the smell hung in his lungs.

The clothes were clean, obviously, however Will couldn't help but still feel a little high off the scent of Hannibal's clothes on himself. He wondered what the time was, and if he had enough time to have a shower. That way, the smell of the older man's body wash would linger on him for the entire day.

What would his co-workers think if they smelt it? Will was sure none of his co-workers actually knew Hannibal's scent to memory, however the thought of the thrill caused Will to have a strange sense of excitement.

Deciding to put those thoughts aside for now, Will pulled back the covers and stood up. He instantly had to stabilise himself with the bedside table beside him as an ache struck through his head, as well as a rush of nausea.

His clothes felt much looser now that he wasn't confined to the bed. He was afraid that without the safety of a belt or elastics, the bottom half of him was ready to be exposed if he moved a little too harshly.

Will took a few steps, testing how well the clothing would hold up. Realising after a few steps that any hazards weren't likely to occur unless he decided to start planning a gymnastics routine, Will deemed his attire acceptable.

There were three doors leading off of Hannibal's bedroom, one being to the hallway of course. The other two, Will assumed, were a bathroom and a closet of some variation.

Small cracks of light peaked through closed curtains, creating quite a tranquil atmosphere. Will took his surroundings properly this time. He hadn't been given the chance for a tour with the events of last night, so it was nice to have a glimpse into Hannibal's private life.

It was perfectly done in Hannibal-fashion. A deep navy acted as the main colour of the room, with accents of silver and dark brown. Morbidly beautiful decorations were scattered throughout the room, like the stag antlers that hung against the wall above Hannibal's bed, which Will didn't doubt were real.

Now standing up, Will could put into perspective how big the bed really was. It took three reasonably sized pillows to fully cover the head of the mattress. Will suddenly felt a rush of embarrassment as he realised he'd managed to make his way over to the middle one in his sleep.

All that space between them and he still managed to gravitate towards Hannibal.

Ripping his gaze away from the unmade bed, Will made his way over to a door he had yet to explore. He opened it to find a bathroom, and just like everything else in Hannibal's possession, it was unnecessarily fancy and big.

There was a walk-in shower in the far corner of the room - which Will hoped to use, a dark grey marble countertop ran along the side of the room, housing an abundance of luxury soaps, lotions and a sink.

The thing that caught Will's eye however, was situated in the centre of the room. There was a freestanding bathtub that acted as the main piece of the room, drawing Will's attention directly to it. He walked closer, inspecting it. It was practically big enough to act as a jacuzzi, *definitely big enough for two people to be in it at once.*

With another sudden wave of nausea, Will was quickly reminded of his initial reason for trying to find a bathroom, and rushed over to the toilet.

After retching whiskey flavoured stomach acid into into the toilet bowl, he splashed his face with water from the sink, as well as attempting to flush out the taste of stale acid from his

mouth.

Will leant over the sink, looking straight on, into the mirror that was plastered against the wall. The face that looked back at him seemed so foreign, yet so familiar. The haziness over a whiskey hangover was evident in his eyes, and nothing he hadn't gotten used to. However, there was an unfamiliar brightness that seemed to grace the space under those squinted eyes.

Now that he thought about it, Will couldn't remember waking up at all last night. It didn't take long to fall asleep, and when he did, it was undisturbed by nightmares or any unwanted awakenings.

He wondered for a moment if sudden change in sleep habits had something to do with the man he slept next to. Although, it could really be anything. From a simple change in scenery, to the comfortable silk that coated his body.

Pressing his cold hands into the skin of his face, Will suddenly realised that Hannibal not being in the bed or the bathroom meant that his whereabouts could be anywhere.

With that thought, he took one last look at himself in the mirror, decided that the mess of hair on his head wasn't worth saving, and decided to find Hannibal.

Thankfully, his first guess to the older man's location hit the nail right on the head. Hannibal's back was to the door of the kitchen as he focused on whatever he had cooking in a pan over the stove.

Will's bare feet fell silent on the cold tile beneath them. He leant on the doorway for a moment, just watching the way Hannibal's shoulder muscles moved as he flipped the contents of the pan.

He was well aware that Hannibal probably knew that he was there. The older man had probably smelt him coming down the stairs, if not, he would've heard him moving about somehow. Still, it was nice to just look at him for a while. There weren't a lot of instances where Will simply got to *observe* Hannibal without the watchful eye of the older man staring right back at him, so he decided to make the most of his chance.

Hannibal was already dressed, and probably had been since the crack of dawn. Will's view of him consisted of the back of a dark green sweater, over a charcoal grey dress shirt, paired with his usual choice of black slacks.

Will felt quite underdressed as he took in the older man's form. He began to consider going back upstairs and getting dressed, only, that thought was cut short by an interruption.

"Remind me, my dear, how is it that you like your eggs?"

Will felt the grin on his face form as he walked over to where Hannibal stood. "You tell me, you're the chef here." He leant on the counter next to the older man, watching his hands as he gripped the pan.

“Jack Crawford called me a few hours ago.” Hannibal sighed.

Will rolled his eyes. “I bet that was a fun thing to wake up to. What did he want?”

“Originally he wanted you, but apparently you weren’t answering his calls.”

“No surprise there. Although I have to ask how it feels to be Jack Crawford’s second choice.”

Hannibal smirked. “I’m devastated.” He looked at Will, a glint of mischief in his eye.

Will smiled back, tilting his head. “You look it.”

“Abigail Hobbs woke up.” Hannibal moved to get a spatula, setting the eggs on two separate plates

Will’s smile was quickly washed off his face. He had been trying to keep his thoughts distracted from Abigail. If there was one thing he understood, it was that she wasn’t healthy for him. He felt that the best option was to simply avoid her completely. He didn’t want to visit her, he didn’t want to hear about her, he didn’t want to think about her.

Will could only nod his head.

“Do you wish to visit her? We could drive there this evening.” Hannibal had now moved on packing other various breakfast foods onto the plates.

“No, I- I don’t think it would do me any good.”

Hannibal nodded with understanding. “And what’s causing you to think so?”

“I’m already buried deep enough into Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ mind. Fulfilling my own desires to get myself involved with Abigail’s life will only dig a deeper hole.”

Hannibal moved to set the two plates down on the kitchen island, taking a seat behind one of the settings. There were already sets of silverware as well as two glasses and glass jug of orange juice set out, which he used to fill the glasses.

Hannibal gazed at Will from where he sat, watching the younger man instead of eating. His eyes travelled carefully down his form every so often. “Are you sure these are your own desires, or could they also be stray drops from Hobbs’ mind bleeding into yours?”

Will sighed, looking up at the ceiling as he leaned back onto a counter. “You tell me, Doctor Lecter.” He muttered.

Hannibal, as per usual, ignored Will’s snarky comment. He patted the stool next to him, gesturing for Will to come over. “Come, sit and eat, my dear.” He was almost hesitant when saying it, not wanting to take away the view in front of him.

Hannibal was delighted to see Will’s compliance to change into his clothes. He considered the idea of buying the younger man a new wardrobe, weighing the idea with the choice of having him simply wear borrowed, ill-fitting clothes from Hannibal’s own closet.

WIll looked perfectly ravishing in red silk. The deep colour of the fabric acted as a perfect catalyst for his eyes, having their blue tint practically glow against it. Hannibal couldn't take his eyes away from the way the waistline sat so precariously, with the only thing keeping the item of clothing up being Will's hips.

For a moment, Hannibal considered offering to let Will borrow some clothes for today. However, even he was sure that such an action may be considered *'pushing it'*.

He watched as Will sauntered over, the loose fabric brushing against his ankles and the tiled floor.

As the younger man sat next to him, Hannibal quickly caught scent of something sour. It was acidic, *putrid.*

He turned to face Will. "Are you feeling alright, Will?"

"Puked in your toilet before I came down here. Sorry I don't smell like a daisy." There was a pause of silence before Will spoke again, in a slightly less venomous tone. "Are *you* feeling alright?"

"I must admit that I haven't drunk such an amount of alcohol in quite a long time, so my body isn't in the best state it could be right now."

"What a strange way of saying you have a hangover." Will smiled into his glass before taking a sip of orange juice.

A comfortable essence of silence filled the room as both men ate their food. Will usually didn't eat anything until he got home from work, and even then, it was likely a slice of toast and whatever fruit he could find. However, a strange hunger overtook this piece of routine as he found himself silently devouring Hannibal's cooking.

Hannibal smiled to himself as he watched the younger man from his peripherals. Will's cheeks had a familiar caved in, gaunt look to them. He seemed to be in the same state that Hannibal had first found him in - unknowingly starving.

This look had eventually faded as Hannibal cooked Will's meals, making sure to leave any leftovers in that tiny apartment fridge. However, it was clear that the contoured shadows on Will's face had returned as Hannibal faded out of his life.

Will broke the silence as he finished his plate. "We'll have to stop at Wolftrap so I can feed the cats. It's on the way and shouldn't take longer than a few minutes."

"Of course. I forgot that you're a family man now." Hannibal joked. "Are they alright to be left alone for this long, or should we leave a little earlier."

Will glanced over to a clock hanging on the wall, which read 7:30. He shook his head. "No, no, it's fine. I always leave extra food out just in case Jack decides to ship me off without any notice. There's a door for them around the back anyway, so I'm sure it's all going well over there."

Hannibal placed his cutlery in a neat line across his now empty plate. “Very well then.” He said.

They both sat, staring ahead, not daring to look in the other’s direction. This went on for another minute or so, until Will was the first to break. The eeriness of the silence had his heart beating faster than he had ever felt it, and his body unable to move an inch.

“Did I- did something happen last night? Did I say anything?” The questions came out half rushed but simultaneously slowly. He chanced a small glance in Hannibal’s direction, attempting to read his face however chickening-out at the last second.

Following Will’s short gaze, Hannibal shifted his body slightly to face Will. “You said a lot of things yesterday, is there something more specific you had in mind?” He was much more collected than Will, so nothing was new there.

“I said a lot? Fuck- I’m sorry, look, did I say anything– to piss you off or something?” The words came out all too quickly and uncontrollably, and Will regretted everything from the moment he opened his mouth to the second he shut it.

Hannibal’s face changed to an expression of confusion, his eyebrows slanting and a small frown becoming present. “No, of course not. Whatever would make you think that my sweet William?”

The sincerity in the older man’s voice and use of endearment brought relief flooding into Will’s mind. “That’s good,” He forced a small laugh out. “Still doesn’t put me in the clear though.”

Will was hesitant to ask his next question. At no point had he ever felt judged or misunderstood when he was with Hannibal. He’d always felt like the older man was the only person on Earth who he felt this way with. Still, there was a small voice in the back of his mind, trying to break through, trying to warn him that there was still a chance that one tiny thing would end it all. Will would say one small thing, and Hannibal would leave him forever.

Hannibal waited patiently, tilting his head and raising his eyebrows to tell Will to carry on.

“I have a tendency to sleepwalk, as well as perform other tasks whilst I’m unconscious. I didn’t cause you any problems, did I?”

Hannibal masked his worry with a calm expression. After the incident last night, he had no doubt that Will was facing more than simple sleep deprivation or effects of alcoholism.

He gave a small smile, taking care to inspect Will’s figure while the younger man was too focused on not looking in Hannibal’s direction. “I assure you, Will, I slept quite comfortably. I hope you can say the same thing?”

As Will turned his head to finally look back at Hannibal, the older man snapped his gaze back up to Will’s eyes.

“Oddly enough, yeah. I slept pretty well.” Will nodded to himself.

“That’s good to hear. You should really invest in a good mattress, Will. Perhaps that’s your problem?”

Will laughed a breath of amusement out his nose. “Yeah, no. I’d probably sleep better on your kitchen counter than I ever would in my own bed.” His tone was joke-y, but there was also a small hint of seriousness behind it.

Hannibal, on the other hand, answered with not an ounce of insincerity. “My home is always open to you. Especially if you’re ever in need of a nap on my kitchen counter.” He gestured to the counter in front of them.

Will lent his elbows over the countertop, laughing at Hannibal’s comment. Hannibal smiled as he watched, charmed by the younger man’s amusement.

He found himself leaning in closer to Will, pulling his body towards him. As he found this close proximity, he also found a much more extensive list of scents to search through.

He realised that without the cover of that rancid aftershave, Will’s natural musk was much more prominent. The sour, acidic smell that Hannibal had previously noticed was there, but he could now smell much more intense scents. Not only could he smell that beautiful, natural fragrance of an untouched Will Graham, but that aroma was now mixed with Hannibal’s own.

To Hannibal, Will smelt like a deep, smoky sweetness. But now, this was mixed with the essence of Hannibal’s laundry detergent, as well as the mixed scent created of them sleeping in the same bed.

Hannibal basked in this, bathing himself in such a beautiful perfume. He closed his eyes and inhaled again. There was still a small hint of that god-awful aftershave, however, he was sure such a stench would be washed away or drowned out in a matter of time.

When he reopened his eyes, he was greeted with the sight of Will Graham once again. There was now a small sheen of sweat covering the surface of his forehead, and his fingers were being used as shields from the light above.

Hannibal’s brows furrowed again. The sight of a dishevelled Will Graham was something Hannibal had always basked in. He loved the way Will looked in the mornings, his hair an unfixed mess of curls, and his eyes still narrowed with sleep. This, however, seemed a little different. Will looked more sick than tired.

With that though, Hannibal finally clocked the smell. Years ago, Hannibal discovered that his keen sense of smell could pick up diseases. He remembered a certain teacher having this sour scent to him, which clearly wasn’t his body odour, since it was mixed with the smell of cleanliness and soap. Just a few weeks after Hannibal had begun to detect this fragrance, the teacher was diagnosed with liver cancer.

Now, Hannibal didn’t think Will had cancer. Last night’s encounter, as well as Will’s headaches and sleep habits told a different story.

All that Hannibal knew was that there was something seriously wrong with his sweet William.

“Will?” Hannibal called out to him quietly. Will’s eyes were covered by his hands, so Hannibal wasn’t entirely sure if he was even awake.

No answer.

“Will, my dear?” He called out again.

And again, no answer.

Hannibal shifted closer, reaching out to place the back of his hand on Will’s forehead. As skin made contact with skin, Will jumped, waking up from whatever he’d been stuck in.

From the small touch that Hannibal had caught, the younger man’s forehead felt burning under his fingers. If it weren’t for last night’s occurrences, Hannibal could assume that Will had some sort of fever, or was suffering from stress overload.

“Will, are you sure you’re okay?” Hannibal did nothing to mask the worry in his voice. He wanted Will to be aware of his concern.

Will flinched away from the touch, running his palms over the slippery fabric covering his thighs. He shook his head defiantly, his face morphing into a frown. “Yeah, like I said, just a bad hangover. Nothing I’m not familiar with.”

Hannibal instinctively bit the inside of his lip, the sharpness of his teeth clashing with the fleshy inside of his mouth. “And how do you normally solve these *hangovers?*” He asked.

Will shrugged. “More alcohol and a shower does the trick for me.” He said nonchalantly.

Hannibal wanted so badly to take Will’s answer as a joke. He wanted to laugh at how funny it was, however, knowing that there was a strong possibility that the younger man wasn’t at all joking prevented him from doing so. All he could give was a small smile, just to come off as more ‘Hannibal the friend’ rather than ‘Doctor Lecter the psychiatrist.’

Hannibal stood up from where he sat, and moved to stack his and Will’s plates. “Well you can certainly take a shower if that’s what you’d like.” He said as he made his way over to the sink. “Everything should already be in the bathroom, feel free to use what you like. *Or,* if you’d like a bath instead, I’m sure there's enough time for that too.” Hannibal added that last part hopefully. Although, he also wouldn’t know what to do if Will agreed to the latter. He wasn’t sure if he’d be able to hold himself back from offering to help bathe him.

Will finally sat up straight from his slumped position. He watched as Hannibal began cleaning up, attempting to subtly stare at his bare arms. Whenever he’d help with the washing up back in university, the only reason Will ever enjoyed doing it was because of the way his hands would occasionally collide with Hannibal’s tanned forearms. He adored the way the older man looked with his sleeves rolled up like this. There was just something so beautiful in seeing Hannibal in a way that others didn’t.

He shook his head, moving to bring the two empty glasses over to think sink. “I’m fine with just a shower, thanks though.” He rolled the sleeves of his shirt up and went to help with the dishes.

Hannibal quickly put Will’s actions to a stop, as he swiped the glasses out of Will’s hands. Will could only stand there and try not to laugh.

“You’re not a bath person then?” Hannibal asked curiously.

Will breathed a huff of amusement. “I use the tub in Wolftrap every six months to wash the cats, and I'm pretty sure that’s as much action as it’s ever got.”

Hannibal nodded. “I can only imagine why that task only happens every six months.”

“Trying to explain to the FBI’s head of behavioural sciences why I have defensive scratch marks all over me isn’t the most enjoyable thing to do, I'll say that much.” Will said as he left Hannibal’s side and began to walk away.

Hannibal gave a hum of agreement. He turned around just to catch a glimpse of Will leaving the room. He couldn’t believe how perfect the younger man looked from every angle. He’d always found himself appreciative of Will’s *curves,* however, seeing his statuesque body in his own baggy clothes, was a sight to behold.

The questions from yesterday afternoon flooded back into his mind.

How would Will’s thighs look straddled over his own?

Now with the added thought of Will Graham being wet and naked just a floor away, Hannibal had to take a deep breath to compose himself.

As he let the warm water from the sink drip over his hands, he couldn’t help but picture the water from the shower flooding over Will’s body. The younger man still had muscle left over from his previous job in the force, however he was still relatively slim, *however still with curves in all the right places.*

Hannibal’s slacks became tighter with every second. He could feel the ache in his groin worsen as the images cast into his mind palace became more and more graphic.

He could hear the faint sound of a shower running, signifying that he’d be alone for at least the next 15 minutes. With that knowledge in mind, Hannibal began to feel his tight underwear starting to soak. He let a small, hitched breath fall from his mouth as he moved to dry his hands on a nearby hand towel.

Shifting uncomfortably where he stood, Hannibal palmed himself through his slacks in an attempt to relieve any tension. He was now fully hard, and his clothing was starting to feel hot and painful as it rubbed against him with every small movement.

With nimble fingers, Hannibal hurriedly unbuttoned his slacks, shifting them so they sat loosely on his hips. He stabilised his body with one hand on the countertop. The other hand acted fast with intention, taking his slick cock out of the tight cell of his silk briefs.

Hannibal had always known himself to produce copious amounts of precum due to his overactive cowper's gland. There had been sexual partners who'd thought nothing of his condition, while others saw it as 'unnatural' and 'strange'.

Hannibal wondered what Will's thoughts would be. He imagined plunging his wet cock into Will's body dry. All they'd need would be a few minutes of preparation, perhaps with Hannibal's tongue, and no lube would be needed. Everything that entered Will's body would be taken from Hannibal directly. Whether it being a swine, slaughtered for the younger man's pleasure, or Hannibal's fingers, reaching and stretching places that nobody could.

With all these thoughts clouding the hallways of Hannibal's palace, he began to stroke himself, his hand sliding slowly down the shaft of his slicked cock. His jaw clenched tightly, teeth grinding together as held back a moan.

He thought of the way the crimson silk had clung to Will's thighs, casting shadows on the curves and dents of his muscles. Hannibal's pace quickened as he pictured the way Will would look on top of him. He'd grip those thighs, holding on so hard that his fingers would leave bruises, marking Will as a reminder of who he belonged to.

Hannibal's ears filled themselves with the sound of Will's sweet moans, and how they would echo off the walls as he bounced on Hannibal's cock.

The psychiatrist tilted his head backwards and closed his eyes, allowing himself to fully slip into the fantasies and pleasures of his mind.

He inhaled deeply, attempting to search for any lasting scent of Will. Although he was met with nothing, that didn't stop him from coming up with something for his brain to feast on.

Hannibal had only once smelt the sweet perfume of Will's arousal. He'd paid the younger man a surprise visit just before his shift at the coffee shop. As soon as Will opened the door, it became very clear that he'd interrupted something. Thankfully, Will seemed to be alone in the apartment, however the delicious scent clung to every room like a vengeful spirit. Hannibal remembered how it had stayed the entire evening, and how he had to cross his legs whenever Will came close, in hopes of hiding the growing damp stain on his crotch.

At the time, Hannibal was in and out of his mind palace every couple of minutes. Every time he laid eyes on Will he couldn't help but wonder what exactly he'd been doing before he heard the knock on the door.

Such a perfect scent wasn't one to be forgotten, and thankfully the memory of it was as clear as the day it happened.

His palm was sticky and wet with precum, along with his cock being soaked in its own fluids. Sounds of pleasure threatened to escape his mouth again, so Hannibal bit hard into his bottom lip. He quickly felt the warm drip of blood cascade down his chin, although it was soon forgotten and replaced with the feeling chasing his orgasm.

Hannibal's wrist was starting to ache from the speed and rough moments around his cock. He searched more doors in the corridors of his palace, until he finally found his favourite room.

The thought of Will's piercings had almost always been the thing to push Hannibal over the edge. He fantasised about pulling and twisting them, only to follow the actions by sucking and biting Will's inflamed chest. He imagined the sweet sounds that would fall from the younger man's mouth, and the way he would twitch with every pull.

With the image of Will's chest arching into Hannibal's mouth as his teeth bit around the metal bar, his mouth fell open as he finally reached his end.

Ropes of cum fell into his hand, covering his palm in the sticky, white liquid.

"Will–" Hannibal breathed into the hot air around him.

His hips twitched involuntarily, followed by a shudder over his back and shoulders. Hannibal was sure that there hadn't been a moment in the past 18 years where he hadn't brought himself to orgasm without thinking about Will, although this time felt so different. His senses seemed heightened, and coming down from such a high was much more difficult than usual.

The thrill of Will being separated only by a few lays of bricks brought such a change in Hannibal.

After the final jerk of his hips passed, Hannibal reached for the towel he'd previously used. He shamelessly wiped his hand over the expensive fabric, then moved it down to clean off any excess liquid off of his spent cock.

After doing so, Hannibal zipped and buttoned his slacks back up, and headed off to the laundry room, where he disposed of the dirtied towel.

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Hannibal smiled at Will as he handed him his jacket from where it hung up beside the front door. His initial thought was to help the younger man into the coat, however he decided against it due to the risk of Will's rejection and uncomfortable car ride to Virginia.

Will thanked him with a small nod, and pulled his arms into the warm sleeves of his old jacket. He could feel the weight of his discarded phone in the pocket, which he took out with a sigh. Reading the recent notifications, Will noticed he had a few missed calls. Most of them were from Jack, however there were also a couple from Beverly.

"Hold on," Will said to Hannibal as he dialed Beverly's number into the phone.

Hannibal stopped just as he was about to open the door after hearing Will. He watched the younger man curiously, catching a glance at his phone and making a swift decision to replace it with something a little more *modern* when he got the chance.

After a few seconds, the sound of Beverly's voice rang through Will's ears.

"Will? Have you left yet?" She sounded like she was in a car.

Will frowned. "No, but we– I was just about to." He dearly hoped Beverly didn't notice his small slip up.

"Oh great, the location has changed suddenly. Brian found something– we think some kid is gonna try to kill his Mom or something. We're driving to the house now. I'll send you the address."

"Right. I'll let Doctor Lecter know." Will waited for the teasing on the other line to start. He prayed that Hannibal couldn't hear Beverly.

"Great. See you soon."

Will was surprised to only hear the quiet beep of Beverly ending the call. Clearly the situation was serious if she had no time to pick at him.

Reaching into another pocket and pulling out the card Hannibal had given him, Will turned back to face the older man, and was met with a calm look of anticipation. "The location's changed, something about a kid trying to kill his Mom. I'll just forward the address to you."

"Very well." Hannibal opened the door and allowed Will to walk ahead. Will nodded in thanks as he began to tap out a number into his phone.

Will wasn't sure what the appropriate name to save Hannibal under was, so he decided on the default of *Doctor Lecter.* Anything else was sure to cause suspicion if people saw a more personal contact name.

Hannibal slipped a guiding arm around Will's waist, making sure he didn't walk into anything as he focused on sending Hannibal the right address. He walked the younger man to the car, finally taking away his arm to open the door for him.

Will slipped his phone back into his pocket and nodded in thanks to Hannibal as he climbed into the passenger seat of Hannibal's Bentley. He could feel a small red flush slipping up to his ears as he realised how distracted he'd been. His mind hadn't even registered Hannibal's touch as he was guided to the car.

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They decided to first stop off at Will's house, so he could check in on the cats, then head to the address Beverly had supplied them with. The place they needed to be was just under an hour from Will's house, which gave them more than enough time to get there.

It took the usual couple of hours to get from Baltimore to Wolftrap. The traffic was as good as it got, and thankfully there was no added time.

Will got out of the parked car and shut the door behind him, he heard the sound of another car door shutting as he began to walk up to his front door. Turning around to discover the source of the sound, he realised that Hannibal had also gotten out of the car and was following Will.

Initially, Will hadn't planned for Hannibal to come inside as well - he was only going to top up the cat's food and leave - however, it wasn't something that was unwelcome.

There were two cats sitting on the fence of the small porch area outside the front door, which Will quickly made his way over to.

"Miss me, darlin'?" Will muttered to a black, short-hair cat as it made its way over to greet him. He picked the cat up, holding the small animal into his chest with one arm as he fished his keys out his pocket with his free hand.

Pushing the door open with the toe of his boot, Will walked inside, hoping to scan the room for anything he could quickly hide from Hannibal.

Thankfully, past Will hadn't left anything too suspicious lying around. The room was sort of messy in places, with a few stray clothes on the floor next to his bed, but there were no half-empty glasses or plates of forgotten food in sight.

With a rush of excitement and speed, Will's legs were hit with the cold sensations of Winston's nose. He smiled happily at the eager animal and clicked his tongue in an attempt to calm him.

Will walked through to the kitchen, cat still in his arms as he tucked his keys back into his jacket. "Sorry if it's a little messy. I wasn't expecting a guest when I left yesterday morning." He added a light tone of amusement in an attempt to sound less malicious.

Hannibal caught up to Will, taking in the surroundings as he walked into the kitchen. "It's quite alright, my dear. A messy room can be a sign of trust in many ways."

Will chuckled softly as he reached into a cupboard to retrieve a bag of pet food. "A sign of laziness more like." He muttered in response.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Hannibal said from behind Will.

Will tried to hold back his ever-growing grin. "That sure is the saying." He turned back to face Hannibal after placing the bag onto the counter next to him. "I keep forgetting– you are okay with cats, right?"

Hannibal smiled softly as he stepped closer to Will. He reached out to run a knuckle over the small cat in Will's arm. "I can't understand how anyone could feel anything but fondness for such creatures."

Will watched the older man's eyes, admiring the look of adoration as the older man interacted with the feline. He chuckled, "Call my cats *creatures* again and I'll force you to wait in the car."

Hannibal looked up to meet Will's gaze. "You cruel boy." He said with a smile.

Will nodded as he bent down to place the animal onto the floor. “Don’t you know it.”

Hannibal took his time inspecting the small details of Will’s kitchen and living/bedroom as the younger man fed the animals.

He couldn’t care less about the cats, life wouldn’t be different if they were there or not. However, Hannibal did know that they made Will happy, and that was all he needed to know that something held some sort of importance.

His thoughts cast back to just a few minutes ago, when Will greeted the small creature,

’Miss me, darlin’.’

Hannibal had always found himself weak at the sound of Will’s voice, but to hear such an endearment with that beautiful southern drawl? He would be happy to die then and there.

He’d always found himself finding new names to call his sweet William, but it had never crossed his mind that Will could find one for him. Hannibal shut his eyes as he leaned his back onto Will’s counter. The younger man was outside, so he was safe to escape to his mind palace for a few moments.

Recording and replaying the beautiful sound of Will’s voice was first on his list of things to do. He documented those words into his mind, in hopes of them coming in as a resource for something late at night.

“That should be everything.” Hannibal heard Will call from outside. “You ready?” He said as he turned to face Hannibal from the door frame.

Hannibal stole one quick glance around Will’s kitchen. The counters were bare, apart from a half-filled glass of water and an unopened bottle of whiskey. He mentally set a reminder to offer meals more often, it was clear that Will’s kitchen was barely in use.

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The car was filled with idle chat and small bursts of comfortable silence as they began the second half of their journey.

During one of these small silences, Will breathed an irritated sigh. “I still can’t understand why I’m even needed for this. I’m a professor, and technically not an FBI agent.”

“Uncle Jack may see you as a fragile teacup, yet he still can’t help but bring his fine china everywhere. He never knows when the occasion to use it will appear.” Hannibal responded, eyes glancing away from the road to look at Will.

Will rolled his eyes in response. “He just *loves* to use me. What does he even expect me to do here– talk a child out of murder with my brilliant social skills.”

“Perhaps he felt you’d feel excluded if you were suddenly uninvited to his party.”

Will gave a small laugh. “I don’t think there's ever been a day where Jack Crawford has felt *bad* for me.”

Hannibal let a pause speak before he replied. “Do you dislike your job, Will?”

The vibration of the car engine rattled against Will’s cheek as he leaned his head on the window. He sighed through his nose. “I dislike it more than I like it.”

“So there are parts of your job that you find enjoyable?”

“I guess so. Beverly was one of the only people to treat me like a human after everything, and teaching is something I would’ve never considered myself to do, although I find a certain happiness in it.”

“Shaping minds can make us feel powerful.”

“Is that a fact or just some twisted fantasy of yours?” Will asked, tone bland but with a hint of amusement.

“Perhaps it’s *your* twisted fantasy.” Hannibal shot back.

“Well thanks for the evaluation, but I’m pretty sure I’d know if I was getting off to the thought of my classroom every night.”

“Then tell me, Will. What is it that has you up at night?”

Hannibal’s sudden question caused Will’s entire body to go into some sort of state of shock. His neck jolted in a quick movement to look at the older man. And as per usual, he was met with a stoic expression, void of anything to read. Hannibal still concentrated his gaze on the road ahead, waiting for Will’s answer as if he’d just asked how his day was.

“What keeps me up at night?” Will asked, repeating the question out loud, just to make sure his ears were working correctly.

“There’s no need to answer so soon. If you want some time, or perhaps don’t wish to answer at all–”

Will cut him off. He hated when Hannibal switched to ‘therapist mode’. “My nightmares keep me awake at night. I sleepwalk occasionally, so waking up in the middle of the night just to find myself hanging out in a field isn’t the most comforting feeling.”

“I don’t recall you waking up at all last night. I’m a light sleeper, and I’m sure you would’ve got me up as well. My body would notice your lack of presence even in sleep.”

A small warmth crept into Will’s face at the strange intimacy of Hannibal’s words. He swallowed the saliva in his mouth, attempting to pull whatever was left of himself together. “I’ll admit, I slept better than I have in the past ten years last night.”

“Like I suggested, my dear, a good mattress can sometimes fix all your problems.” Hannibal smiled to himself.

Will tilted his head in amusement. “If buying a new mattress fixed half my problems I’d have the comfiest bed on the planet.”

“I could recommend a brilliant company if you’re planning on trying.”

“Let's see if this case can be solved with a gun and dream first, then we can start bringing mattresses into it.”

“Very well.”

The silence that filled the car shook an ache through Will’s head, reminding him of the hangover he’d managed to distract himself from. He’d also usually had some sort of alcohol by now, so his body was starting to disagree with the sudden change in routine. His forehead was breaking out with a small sheet of sweat, his limbs felt heavy and everything itched.

Ignoring the rattling noise it made, Will pulled the bottle of aspirin from his jacket pocket, and quickly knocked back a handful. He ignored the glance that Hannibal cast him in an attempt to act ‘normal’.

-Espoir-

Will moved quickly as Hannibal pulled into the driveway of a large, suburban house. It was the sort of house he would walk by on his way to school, if he wanted to go the long way, and imagine living the life of the kid who was being driven to school by the car parked in the driveway.

These fantasies were what kept Will going through the confusing years of his childhood. His imagination kept him from insanity. When the TV went out, and he’d read all the books in the house, Will would make his own scenarios. He’d play out his own life in his head, where he lived in one of those rich people houses, with his Mother and Father. His parents were happy. They all loved each other, and lived happily.

Of course, these fits of imagination were always shattered by the alarming shout of a voice or a glass shattering against the wall.

Will let his feet guide him around the side of the house, following Beverly and Jack silently. They had barely acknowledged his presence, with Bev simply offering a small nod before Jack had them running.

Everything happened so fast, and Will soon found himself standing over the bleeding body of a woman. Her face was ugly even in death, and Will found her features to be some sort of mutant cross between a mouse and a rabbit, with a lizard thrown in there somewhere.

Usually in these situations, Will could find himself empathising with both the killer and the victim. But for some reason, he could find no beauty in this crime.

Everything about it was ugly.

The young, kidnapped boy stood wordlessly next to Will. He started up at him, and not at the woman's cooling corpse.

For a split second, Will's heart felt hot. He gazed into the scared boy's eyes, and at the way his unkempt brown hair covered them with the wind.

It reminded Will of himself.

It reminded him of that young boy, who just couldn't understand why he felt so different to everyone else. The young boy who didn't get why he was treated differently. The young boy who so desperately tried to fit in, only for everything to get worse and worse.

"Will," Jack's booming voice towered over his own quiet thoughts. "Doctor Lecter's waiting out at the front if you're feeling unstable."

Will blinked, and the young boy was being ushered away by Beverly.

"Will." Jack repeated, sounding slightly more irritated than last night. "Do I need to get Doctor Lecter?"

Will blinked over and over again, trying to bring himself back to whatever was going on around him. "No, no." He shook his head rapidly. "I'll go find him."

He didn't look back at Jack as he walked off to find Hannibal. He didn't look at the empty bullet cases over the garden, or the small pool of blood over at the barbecue.

Will found Hannibal leaning against the hood of his Bentley, looking cautiously around at passing officers.

As soon as the older man spotted Will, he broke into a brisk walk, and a worried smile graced his face.

Reaching out to Will, Hannibal ran a soft palm over his cheek. "My dear, I heard gunshots. Are you hurt?"

Will found himself leaning into the touch, facing his chin down and staring at his and Hannibal's shoes. "Not a scratch on me, don't worry." He smiled. "Why, were you worried?"

Hannibal furrowed his brows, his thumb rubbing over Will's cheekbones. "*Worried?* Sweet William, I was afraid you had died for a moment."

Will looked up to meet Hannibal's soft gaze. "Like I said, not a scratch on me. No need to worry your pretty head, *darlin'*."

Will noticed how Hannibal's eyes widened ever so slightly for a split-second. The movement was so slight, and Will assumed that any other person wouldn't have noticed. He always felt a rush of excitement crowd over his spine whenever he caught those small moments of Hannibal's strict exterior slipping.

Offering a genuine smile, Will brought his hand up to where Hannibal's rested on his face. He pulled the older man's hand away, intertwining it together with his own as he brought it down to his side.

Hannibal closed his eyes and inhaled deeply, leaning into Will's space as he did so.

"You used my body wash." He stated calmly, opening his eyes back up to meet Will's.

Will flinched his gaze away, subconsciously bringing his head down in an attempt to hide his reddening cheeks. "Sorry, was I not supposed to– I didn't see anything else so I only assumed-" His unoccupied hand twitched by his hip.

Hannibal tightened his grip on Will's hand, distracting the younger man from his own rambling. "I don't mind at all. Infact, I encourage it." Hannibal inhaled through his nose again. "You must remind me to buy a bottle of your own, the scent mixes perfectly with your natural musk."

Will swallowed down the bubble that had been building in his throat. "It's fine, really. I'm happy with my CVS soap, it gets the job done."

Hannibal gave a non-committal hum as an answer.

Feeling his palms becoming hotter and hotter, Will reluctantly withdrew his hand from Hannibal's. The older man's eyebrow twitched marginally at the gesture, looking Will up and down for any sign of reason.

Will knew the feeling that was brewing was the start of withdrawal symptoms. He'd been through them plenty of times in the past, and each one was as bad as the last. He knew that if his body didn't get a replenishment soon, it was going to get a whole lot worse.

"I'm sorry that you were dragged all the way out here for nothing." Will faced the floor instead of Hannibal's eyes as he spoke. "I can always get a car back with the lab rats if you don't want to leave now– or I don't mind driving instead."

Hannibal shook his head politely. "You're still a little feverish, and in no state to drive all the way to Quantico. I'm also sure that a three hour journey with Jack Crawford and the forensics team could somehow impact you negatively. Am I correct?"

Will offered a small smile and a nod.

Hannibal turned, facing his parked car. "That leaves one option."

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The drive back to Quantico was silent. Hannibal understood not to ask questions about what Will had just witnessed. Right now, the younger man needed Hannibal, not Doctor Lecter.

Eventually, Hannibal was met with an interruption in the silence. Will's breathing was heavier and more balanced, with occasional quiet snores. He found himself smiling fondly at the younger man's sleeping form. His mouth hung open slightly, and his head rested comfortably on the window beside him.

Hannibal contemplated finding a longer journey to the academy, but the chances of Will waking up and discovering the detour wasn't one he was willing to risk explaining.

He sighed as he brought his eyes back to the road. Hannibal knew that Will's line of work wasn't the safest one out there. He understood that Will had been seriously injured before, and the likelihood of such a thing happening again was high. But he couldn't help but recall the feeling that ran over his body as he heard those gunshots.

If Will were to rely solely on Hannibal, he'd never have to work a day in his life and could live as comfortably as he wanted to. Although, Will had said that there were certain parts of his job that he had found enjoyable, and Hannibal wasn't one to take away Will Graham's happiness.

Manicured fingertips tapped along the rich leather of the Bentley's steering wheel as Hannibal delved deeper into his mind palace.

The walls had paintings, upon paintings of his dear Will. Hannibal had realised after their parting that the younger man had quickly become his reason for living. And even miles and miles away from each other, this reason stuck.

Everyday in those 18 years, Hannibal had woken up with the hope that he might run into Will Graham.

He could remember the day he'd seen the Tattlecrime headline for the first time. At first, he'd simply been interested in the work of Buffalo Bill and he'd been following parts of the case through articles that piqued his interest. However, when Hannibal saw the image that was clipped with the article, it was as if his heart dropped through his body. Seeing the scrawny, tired face of an older Will Graham was all it took for him to have a reason to keep going.

From that day, Hannibal dedicated all the spare time he had to finding his way into working with Jack Crawford, and connecting himself with Will Graham.

The thought of all that work coming to waste at the cause of a gunshot was almost terrifying. Hannibal had only had Will back in his arms for less than a week, and that wasn't nearly enough time for him to check anything off his bucket list.

Hannibal's dreams had been filled with only Will Graham for the past 18 years, and soon his days would be full of only him as well.

Chapter End Notes

So we're all just going to pretend like this isn't a week late!!!!!!

I haven't a clue what I was on about during this chapter, so I apologise for it not being as 'strong' as some of the previous ones.

But thank you to everyone who was patient with me, I really am sorry about the whole delay.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Meet Roger and Marilyn Brunner," Jimmy Price handed Will a file as he walked into the morgue alongside Beverly Katz.

Will looked down at the bodies that the agent was referring to. There were two of them, both laid onto their backs to show off the lifting skin, cut into the shapes of wings.

He hadn't slept much the night before, and had little to no recollection of the evening. Will wasn't someone to blame the problems caused by alcohol on something different, so he just assumed this memory loss was something to do with his drinking.

"You might recognize them from lists such as *most wanted.* He likes to rape and murder – she likes to watch." Price finished an almost sing-song voice.

He carried on to mention how they were identified, something about a stolen car and convicted felon – none of it mattered in Will's mind.

Will looked again at the two corpses lying in front of him. "I wonder how long it took *angel maker* to identify him." He said bitterly.

He can hear Price give a response to that, then Beverly carrying on. He can even hear himself give something to the conversation at times. But even then, his mind was elsewhere, diving deep into the killer's in an attempt to find something he didn't know he was searching for.

"All he has to do is believe." Will spoke quietly to himself. He didn't even realise he was saying something out loud before he heard his own voice.

The two other people in the room looked at him for a few counts, Price nodding slowly and Beverly simply staring.

"Well," Beverly started. "On a lighter note, I feel like I haven't seen you in a while, Will. Where've you been?" She offered a small smile.

Will mentally thanked her for managing to snatch the attention from his strange comment. "I haven't had time to be in the office. Trying to teach when your boss has you whisked away to a crime scene every other morning isn't the easiest thing to do."

It was coming up on five days since the Lost Boys case had officially wrapped up for good. Most of those days, Will had been dragged away by Jack Crawford to have a look at some skinned bodies, which was always a delight of course.

"Well it's good to have you back for a minute. I must admit there's some answers I've been dying to get out of you." She gave him a mischievous smirk, along with raising her eyebrows.

Will furrowed his brow. “About what?”

Beverly just rolled her eyes. “About dinner-slash-porno with your therapist, of course– what else would I ask you about.”

Will gave a sarcastic ‘thinking’ face. “I’m not sure, perhaps the two *skinned* bodies in front of us.”

Both Beverly and Jimmy simply looked at Will with anticipation, not saying a word.

Sighing, Will glanced down at the watch on his wrist. “I need to leave in ten minutes.” He looked back at the expectant faces. “Fire away.”

Beverly let out a breath she didn’t know she had been holding in. “Alright, I’ll start off with the big one. Did you guys fuck or not?”

If Will had water in his mouth, he would’ve done a perfect spit take. He looked between the two agents’ faces in confusion. “Are you even allowed to ask that?”

“All I know is that you’re allowed to answer.” She glanced at Jimmy. “I think.” She added in a quieter voice. The scientist simply shrugged at her comment.

Will gave another sigh, holding the material of his shirt with his fingers as he crossed his arms over his chest. “No, we did not *fuck.* Look, I don’t even know where you getting these ideas from–”

Will was cut off. “The wife. Was she some sort of Victoria's Secret model?” She fired at him.

“I didn’t meet *’the wife’*.” Will rolled his eyes.

“What?” Beverly whined. “I thought we were finally getting a good shot at finding what this lady looks like.”

Out of the corner of his eyes, Will saw someone enter the morgue behind Beverly and Jimmy. He looked up from where his gaze laid on the floor, bringing the blurry figure into focus. It was a man – tall, broad, muscular build. And his clothing blended into the blue-ish, grey patterned walls of the building.

“What lady?” Asked the accented voice.

Beverly didn’t even bother to turn around before answering. “Lecter’s wife.”

Will couldn’t help but smile as he made eye-contact with the taller man. He could feel his own anticipation for the conversation. That small, jealous sting that stabbed Will every time Hannibal’s theoretic wife was mentioned could finally be left in the past.

Hannibal gave Will a wink, (which obviously made the younger man’s ears flush a deep shade of pink), as he made his way over to where Will stood. As he walked into the eyeline of Katz and Price, Will was pleasantly met with the shocked, pale faces of both agents.

Beverly began to stutter out a response. “Doctor Lecter– we weren’t gossiping about you. I was just asking Will some questions and we happened to cross the topic off–” Her words tumbled out her mouth uncontrollably and quickly.

“It’s quite alright Miss Katz.” Hannibal said calmly as he stood closely beside Will.

Will brought his hand down from where it rested by his chest, allowing it to sit at his hip, next to Hannibal’s.

“Although,” Hannibal continued. “I must admit, I am a little confused.”

Will held his laughter in a badly suppressed smile. He could already tell Hannibal was about to be his usual self, and make some smug comment along the way. And in no way was he going to try to stop him.

Beverly looked taken aback. “You are?” She asked, puzzled.

“Yes,” Hannibal nodded. “You see, I do not have a wife. So, I too am curious to find out what this lady looks like.” He said matter-of-factly as his fingers rubbed against Will’s in an unspoken language.

Will rolled his eyes in amusement, fighting the urge to grip the older man’s hand.

Jimmy and Beverly looked to each other, then back to Hannibal. “You don’t?” They said in unison after a long pause of shared confusion.

Hannibal squinted his eyes and frowned. “Not that I know of.”

Will was getting ready to present an emmy award to him if he managed to carry on the whole ‘clueless’ facade. He’d seen the way Hannibal could keep an act up for hours and hours when meeting new people, so it would be no surprise if this kept on for longer. Will smiled at the thought, feeling the deep crease lines below his eyes as he did so.

Beverly shook her head in disbelief. “There must’ve been some misconception along the way. Doctor Bloom told us you were married.”

Hannibal’s eyes widened slightly, probably showing the most emotion to the two agents they’d ever seen. “Is there any reason as to why she would lie about such a fact?”

Jimmy cut in before Beverly could. “I don’t think she meant to lie– the confusion probably started with her.”

“Right,” Beverly continued. “Alana told us she’d seen a picture of your wife in your wallet, does that help at all?”

Will was curious about Hannibal's next move. He could prove that the picture in his wallet wasn’t his wife, however that would include having to show the picture. When Will mentioned the story in Abigail’s hospital room, Hannibal made no move to show the person who was actually in the photo, which had Will curious about this mystery person.

Hannibal nodded slowly, as if he'd finally put the pieces together. "Ah yes, of course."

The three other people in the room stared at him expectantly.

Hannibal seemed to make no move to pull out his wallet. "That photograph I keep in there is of someone very dear to me. Although we are not married."

Will folded his arms back over his chest, moving his hand from Hannibal's. He couldn't help but feel a knot tighten in his stomach at the thought of the older man feeling the need to hide something from him. Will always hoped that Hannibal felt comfortable telling him whatever needed to, and never felt a need to hide anything.

Perhaps life had changed more than Will had initially thought. Did Hannibal not trust him anymore? Had they really grown apart over that decade?

Feeling the sudden lack of warmth at his fingertips, Hannibal gave a small glance to Will, where he was met with the younger man staring firmly at a blank wall opposite him.

Beverly and Jimmy were chatting excitedly in front of them, but it suddenly felt as if the world had gone silent.

Hannibal cleared his throat, causing the two agents to quickly quiet and look over to the taller man. "Agent Crawford should be here soon. I told him I'd walk ahead to give a needed warning."

Will snapped out of his staring, looking quickly at Hannibal with a concerned face. "Why is Jack coming down, did something happen?"

Heavy footsteps echoed through the cold room before Hannibal could reply. Will's head fell to face the floor in a sigh of defeat.

Jack Crawford spared no greeting as he walked over to the group. "Katz, Price you're in with Zeller." He motioned to Brian Zeller, who had come in behind him. "Graham, it's either me or Doctor Lecter."

Will blinked profusely, trying to shake away the forming headache Jack Crawford's voice was bringing him. "What are you talking about?" He said, reaching into his pocket, as if he was on some sort of algorithm, to pull out the bottle of aspirin.

Jack had already turned on his heel and was moving to walk back out. "Our Angel maker dropped a body last night. Some homeless guy found it about an hour ago, and not too far from here."

The group reluctantly followed Jack down the hallway of the building, with Will catching up to the Head of the behavioural sciences as they rushed.

"Jack– you can't just tell me to go on such short notice, I need–" Will began to protest, taking off his glasses and slipping them into his jacket pocket.

"Do you have any lectures left for today?" Jack said, cutting Will off.

Will rolled his eyes. “No, but I still need to–”

Jack cut him off again. “Then there’s no reason that you can’t come along to a scene, which you’re *needed* at.” His tone was calm, but his words still cut like a sharp sword.

“Jack, I have things I need to get back to at home. I can’t just leave for a few hours, it doesn’t work like that.”

Jack stopped abruptly in the middle of the hallway, causing everyone behind him to do the same. He turned quickly to face Will, standing tall over him. “I know it doesn’t work like that, Graham. I have my wife to go back to, but I’m not too sure you can quite imagine how that would feel. Who do you have? Your pack of *cats*? You can start complaining when there's actually someone at home who misses you.”

Will suddenly felt quite small under Jack’s presence. He stood, mouth slightly agape and eyes fixed to the floor as he watched his boss walk away in his peripheral vision.

After a moment of sympathetic and apprehensive glances, the other fraction of the group rushed past Will as well, speed walking to catch up with their boss.

For the first time in almost twenty years, Will felt like crying.

And for the first time in a long while, he heard a voice that hadn’t visited him in many years.

The voice of Will’s father echoed in the back of his mind as he stood silently in the empty hallway of the FBI building. It shouted at him from above, leaned down into his face and told him not to cry, told him to suck the tears back in and be a man about it, told him that he wasn’t going to coddle him like his damned Mother.

That familiar, sour, metallic taste returned to his tongue, as well as the stabbing headache, undulled by the aspirin. An uneasy sense of dread had formed in his stomach and was now only becoming worse and worse, turning from just a bad feeling into pain. Will’s hands shook by his sides and his heart thrummed rapidly in his chest.

As his eyes rested firmly on the ground below, Will’s focus on his thoughts was abruptly broken by the movement in his eyeline.

A pair of black dress shoes stepped opposite Will’s. He went to bring his head up to see who these shoes belonged to, however he was instead met with a cool hand over his forehead. Instead of pushing away the sudden touch, Will felt himself melt into it. He breathed a sigh of relief at the cold touch of skin.

“Your name is Will Graham, you’re in Quantico, Virginia. It’s seven twenty-two in the evening. You’re with Hannibal Lecter, you are safe.”

Will finally looked up to meet the eyes of the accented voice, and was pleasantly welcomed by the soft gaze of those familiar crimson irises.

He nodded against Hannibal’s hand. “I’m safe.” He repeated, the words coming out a lot more shaky than Hannibal’s were.

“Are you with me?” Hannibal asked worryingly, his hand sliding from Will’s forehead to hold his cheek.

Will felt his heart rate begin to slow down, and the tingling in his fingertips was beginning to stop. “I’m with you.” He replied breathlessly. He stared at Hannibal, taking the sight of the older man in. He wore a brown and grey plaid overcoat with a deep red zip-neck sweater, all on top of his usual dress shirt, slacks and tie. His hair was in the beginning of coming out of its usual styling, falling over his forehead slightly.

He looked so effortlessly handsome.

Will gave a regretful smile. “Did I have another seizure?”

“It wasn’t as bad as the one you had when you previously saw me. Have you felt anymore come on since then?”

Will shook his head. “Not that I can remember– I’ve been losing sleep lately, it sort of messes with my memory.” He added quickly.

Hannibal simply nodded his head. He had a strong look of concern on his face, and was clearly thinking deeply about something.

With his vision clearing up and his legs feeling more stable, Will moved away from Hannibal and started to walk in the direction Jack had left.

Hannibal hurriedly followed after him, reaching out and grabbing Will’s shaking hand as he did so.

Will quickly turned his head to look at Hannibal, confused at the sudden touch and half expecting the older man to stop him. Instead, Hannibal kept walking with Will, hand in hand.

“Where are you going?” Hannibal asked, his long strides easily keeping up with Will’s hurried walking.

Will gave him a puzzled look. “Jack said I had to be at the new location.”

“Mylimasis, you need to be at a hospital.” Hannibal glanced down at Will as they strutted through the hallways.

Will shook his head and screwed his eyes. “The sooner I get it done, the sooner I can go home. There's no point going against Jack now, it’ll only make him angrier.”

Hannibal wasn’t at a loss for words, he had many things on his mind that he would’ve loved to get out. However, he couldn’t seem to bring himself to deny Will. Another part of his mind allowed Will to continue out of curiosity. He hadn’t seen Will *’in-action’* as Jack had described it, and was curious to see how his brain worked. Hannibal had seen a snippet during the Hobbs case, when Will managed to pick out Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ name seemingly out of thin air, but he wanted to see *more.*

“Very well.” Hannibal agreed.

Walking silently down the FBI academy hallways, hands still intertwined, Will couldn't help but feel the usual rush of worry he had before leaving for a crime scene wash away. Hannibal's smooth skin was soft under his rough touch, and the warmth of his hand was like a heated lifeline.

Although this moment felt almost serene, that feeling was quickly brought away by the sight of a certain psychiatrist walking towards Will as they turned a corner.

"Will, I thought I missed you," Alana said hurriedly as she stopped in front of the two men. "And Doctor Lecter, I didn't expect to see you as well." She added.

"Jack wants his help for the angel maker case." Will replied blankly, keeping his eyes fixed on the wall behind her.

Alana's gaze danced up and down Will, a look of sympathy subconsciously crossing her face. She then turned her head to look at Hannibal. "I could get you out of it if you need. Jack can sometimes take more than he needs." She smiled.

Hannibal kept the same blank expression as Will. "I volunteered myself, actually. But thank you anyway, Doctor Bloom." He flashed her a small, almost sarcastic smile.

Alana's eyes suddenly made their way down to where the two men's hands rested. She eyed the sight with confusion, however quickly took her gaze away in hopes of not being too obvious. She knew it could be anything – Hannibal was of course Will's psychiatrist, and perhaps he had found that something so simple as physical touch was the key to the agent's stability. Will did look a little more relaxed than usual. His tired eyes were still unrested, but he didn't look so angry.

"Well, that's alright then." She cleared her throat. "Will, I just wanted to catch you before you left – there's something I thought you should know."

Will furrowed his brow. "Yes?" He made a weak attempt to hide the annoyance in his voice.

"I made some calls when it happened, but you didn't pick up – and I haven't had a chance to see you since."

Will widened his eyes, urging her to get to her point.

"Abigail Hobbs woke up." She said hastily.

"I know." Will replied nonchalantly.

Alana looked confused. "You do? How?" She questioned.

Will simply shrugged. "Doctor Lecter told me." He said, as if it was the most obvious answer he could've given.

Alana nodded slowly. "I've mentioned you a few times, she'd like to meet you." Alana offered a hopeful smile.

Will sighed. “It wouldn’t be good for me to mix with Abigail Hobbs. I’m already unstable and she'd only be a catalyst in my mind.”

“But Will–”

Hannibal interrupted. “Abigail Hobbs is your patient, Will Graham is mine. I’m sure we can decide what is good and what is bad for our own patients.”

Will suppressed a smile at Hannibal’s sudden display of rudeness.

Alana opened her mouth to say something, but quickly shut it, only to open it again. “Will Graham isn’t technically your patient. You’re just having scheduled conversations.” She said, matter-of-factly.

Will was the one to answer Alana this time. “Scheduled conversations… therapy sessions. Lines can sometimes be blurred.”

Hannibal watched Will fondly as he spoke. Nodding at what the younger man said.

“Now I apologise, Doctor Bloom,” Hannibal started, checking his watch. “However, we should be leaving now. I hope to see you soon.”

Alana was at a loss for words. Not only had Hannibal shown the most amount of ‘rudeness’ that he’d ever shown to her, but he’d taken Will Graham’s side, and had called her by her official title the entire time. She gave a nod out of politeness to Hannibal’s farewell.

Taking this as a signal to leave, Hannibal continued to walk down the hallway, Will following by his side, hand in hand.

They walked in silence down the glum hallways of the FBI building, eventually reaching the crowded parking lot. People were running about and shouting at each other - it was a common sight in this situation.

Will caught sight of Jack and the science time discussing something by the hood of a black SUV.

Beverly was the first to notice Will and the only one to acknowledge him. She squinted her eyes and gave a small tilt of her head to him from across the parking lot - a gesture, asking if he was okay.

Before Will could respond to the gesture, he saw Beverly’s face suddenly drop. She pointed at something near Will, then said something that he couldn’t quite make out to the others around her, causing them all to quickly look in that direction.

Following where Beverly had pointed, Will turned his head, only to be met with the approaching sight of vibrant, red hair.

Freddie Lounds gave him a smile as she walked over to him. She wore a leopard print dress, under a black shawl, along with matching gloves and heeled boots. *Dressed like a ready-to-pounce predator.*

As she stopped in front of him, Will gave Hannibal's hand a soft stroke with his thumb, before letting their grip unfasten.

"Special agent Graham," She said with a sinister smile. "I don't think I've ever formally introduced myself. I'm Freddie Lounds." Freddie held out a gloved hand expectantly, waiting for Will to shake it.

Will kept his arms firmly at his side. "I know who you are, Freddie. Unless you have a visitor's pass, right now you are trespassing."

"Well it's good to know we can drop the formalities." She replied, ignoring Will's comment completely. "And who might this be? You're an unfamiliar face next to our favourite agent." Freddie asked, putting down her hand and nodding to Hannibal.

"Doctor Hannibal Lecter." Hannibal introduced himself. Will was grateful that he didn't mention that he was also Will's psychiatrist – Freddie would have a field day knowing she met his therapist.

Jack, as well as the science time had made their way over to where Will was standing. Jack and Beverly looked annoyed at Freddie Lounds' presence, whilst Brian looked tired and Jimmy seemed unbothered.

"Miss Lounds this is private property, if you don't leave I will call security." Jack said from behind her.

Ignoring Jack Crawford, Freddie continued her conversation with Hannibal. "Are you… his partner? He's a little old for you, isn't he? Although, I'd always taken our Will as someone who swings for that team. It's good to see my intuition is still spot-on as ever."

Neither Hannibal nor Will replied. They gave the red-headed journalist a blank stare, with Hannibal giving a small glance to Will. Although the younger man looked calm, Hannibal could tell that he was far from it. Will was biting the inside of his cheek, and tapping together his index finger and thumb. The two small actions would be noticeable to the common eye, but Hannibal felt he could read Will like an open book.

"Miss Lounds, as I said–" Jack was quickly interrupted by Freddie's unbothered voice.

Her predatorial smile stayed plastered on. "Do you want me to act like I didn't see you holding hands just a second ago, or, are you just pissed that I pointed out the obvious? I wonder."

"Pleasure to see you as always, Freddie, but we have to get going now." Will was starting to feel the cold of Quantico's air and wanted to be in the comfort of Hannibal's heated Bentley as soon as he could.

Freddie nodded understandably. "Of course, I wouldn't want to intrude on date night." She tilted her head and smiled. As she began to turn around to leave, she suddenly stopped and whipped her head back to face Will. "Although, don't be too embarrassed when your little

posse knows the real reason behind your limp tomorrow." And with a swish of her red curls, Freddie Lounds strutted off and away.

Will tried not to acknowledge how Beverly's eyes grew wide, Jack and Brian's grimaces grew even more and Jimmy's cheeks tinged a polite colour of red.

"Sorry about her, you'll have to just get used to it." Will said to Hannibal, sighing to himself over the ordeal. He had to make sure his hair was covering the tops of his ears, hiding the redness of them over Freddie's comments.

Hannibal turned to face Will, smiling contently at him. "It's quite alright, I'm sure I've dealt with worse." He winked with the eye that wasn't visible to the group standing opposite them, causing an amused smile to grace Will's face.

"Damn right." He muttered.

Jack clapped his hands together, startling Will with the sudden loud noise. "C'mon people, we're only wasting time here." He shouted around the parking lot. "Get yourself together and get where you need to be." He avoided eye contact with Will as he made his way back to the black SUV with Jimmy and Brian.

Beverly stayed behind, her expression now hiding the once shocked look. "Are you going to be okay? You don't technically need to be at the scene, so if you needed to leave there's nothing stopping you." She said to Will, not trying to hide the obvious concern in her voice.

Will shook his head slowly. "I'll be fine, trust me." He gave a pathetic smile, trying to assure her.

Beverly sighed through her nose, clearly not convinced. "If you say so. I'll see you on the other side then."

"See you on the other side." Will replied as Beverly made her way over to the rest of the team.

When she was out of earshot, Will turned back to Hannibal. "So are we taking my car or yours?" He asked.

"You're not going with Jack?" Hannibal asked with a sarcastic tone of shock.

Will couldn't help but smile. "Ha-ha." He rolled his eyes. "Now get going before I force you into my cat-hair-covered truck and make you listen to the worst southern rock radio I can find."

With that, Hannibal broke into a quick stride with Will following closely behind. "Of course, my sweet William." He muttered happily.

Their conversations during the journey consisted of nothing and everything – just like every conversation that they have.

During a small gap of comfortable silence, Will finally said something that had been building up as soon as Hannibal had walked into the morgue. “I’m sorry for missing my session today. Jack had me write reports through my breaks, so I had to stay longer to check out the bodies. I get you have a thing for rudeness, so I wanted to apologise – for being *rude*.”

Hannibal smiled and shook his head. “It’s quite alright. You may burn my house to ashes, and insult my entire family bloodline, and even then, I would assume you simply had a bad day. I don’t believe there's anything you could do that I would consider *rude*.”

“Oh?” Will replied in a mischievously flirty tone.. “Absolutely nothing?” He asked.

“Absolutely nothing, mylimasis.” Hannibal repeated

Will thought for a moment. “What if I refused to eat your cooking?”

“There must’ve been something wrong with the meat.” Hannibal replied casually.

“What if I had your psychiatry licence taken away?”

“It was time for a change in career paths anyway.”

Will sucked his teeth, digging deep for something that Hannibal would consider rude. “What if I accused you of murder?” He asked tauntingly.

Hannibal glanced to the side, giving Will a small look of seriousness. “Who said you’d be wrong?”

Will broke into a fit of laughter, leaning back into the comfortable seat of Hannibal’s car. “I don’t think I’d even be too surprised.” He leaned his head to the side, looking at the older man with amusement. “You have a very villainess aura, as well as the look. Did you know that?”

Hannibal quirked his eyebrow. “I did not know that, no.”

“You have this commanding *thing* to you, it’s sort of intimidating I guess.” Will replied quickly. “I guess that’s why everyone in the office was so obsessed about meeting your wife. They wanted to know what sort of person could possibly win the charm of the noble Doctor Lecter.”

“Are you intimidated by me?” Hannibal asked curiously.

Will shook his head. “It’s difficult to be intimidated by someone when you’ve watched them drunkenly attempt to make pasta with cold water, then get angry at the pasta whilst swearing at it in Lithuanian.” He said, amusement very present in his tone. “So no, I can’t say I am intimidated by you.”

“Perhaps I should start introducing you as my wife then. That way people can lay their eyes on the only person Hannibal Lecter hasn’t yet managed to intimidate.”

Will tried to ignore the flip his stomach did, and the hot feeling growing in his face. “The problem with that is that I couldn’t be your wife, as I’m not a woman. I also couldn’t be your husband, as we’re not married.”

“Such titles are just meaningless labels. A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.”

Will scratched the bridge of his nose. “I’ve already heard enough teasing about my love life today. I don’t need it from you as well.”

Hannibal tilted his head in agreement. “Allow me to change the subject then. Why is it that you felt uncomfortable talking with Freddie Lounds, I thought you said you were used to her by now?” It wasn’t a shot at Will, he was only asking the question because he wanted an answer.

Will sighed and shrugged. “I never know what she’ll write about next. Sometimes we’ll have what I think is a meaningless conversation, only to discover she’s written an article about it the next day – or, she’ll ask me a bunch of questions, so I’ll check Tattlecrime, assuming that she would’ve written about it, only to discover nothing there. She’s unpredictable, and not in a good way.”

“You’re afraid she will write about your sexuality.” Hannibal said, his attention focused on driving.

Will tried not to look taken aback by the older man’s forwardnes, giving an awkward laugh in place. “There’s always that. But– but it’s mainly you. I always felt bad when people assumed we were a couple in college, I just don’t want that to happen again.”

Hannibal’s face twitched slightly, the person suit he usually wore slipping for a moment. “Does it bother you when people assume we are in a romantic relationship, or when they make sexual remarks regarding our relationship?” He asked, and Will thought he sounded almost *sad.*

Will’s head shot up, his body straightening as his gaze stayed fixed on Hannibal. “No, no it’s not that at all– well, not that–” He stumbled over his words, trying to figure out the correct thing to say without the defence of *’I’ve actually been hopelessly in love with you since I was 20.’* “I just thought that those kinds of comments would make you uncomfortable, and I would hate it if you stopped being around me to avoid those sorts of comments.”

“I assure you, my dear, I’ve put up with much worse than someone assuming I’m in a romantic relationship with someone. I’m a man with a foreign accent in America, who prefers to dress in a more extravagant way than most.” Hannibal looked to make eye contact with Will, then down to the younger man’s hand. He had missed the touch ever since they had parted, and contemplated reaching out.

Will brought his palms up to his face, running the rough skin over his cheeks and jaw. “It’s not just a relationship with *someone*, Hannibal, it’s a relationship with a man, *with me.* A lot of people would be very quick to correct if someone assumed they were dating me.”

Deciding to take his chance, Hannibal, with his eyes now on the road, took Will's hand into his own, guiding it away from the younger man's face and down to rest on his thigh, just like they had done a week ago.

"Whilst that may be the opinion of others, I simply do not mind."

Will wasn't convinced, staring at their intertwined fingers. "You don't?" He asked, hoping for a reason.

"I don't." Hannibal repeated. "In fact, I see it as quite a compliment. Not only because of your looks, but also because of the distance you create between yourself and others. People assume that I was the one to tame the heart of the aloof agent, Will Graham."

"I get it now," Will gave a small chuckle. "It's a power thing. I don't know why I never just assume that in the first place." He said to himself jokingly.

"Whatever makes you believe it's a power thing?" Hannibal asked, intrigued for Will to explain the magnificent workings of his mind.

Will shrugged, turning his body to sit upright and face the windshield. "You have this sort of complex, usually it revolves around other people, and them being below you." Will paused, mulling over his words and thoughts for a moment. "Although, you see me as an equal. So maybe it's not that…" He trailed off, losing himself in his theory.

"How do you know I see you as an equal?" Hannibal stopped at a light, turning his head to watch Will.

Will smirked as his eyes met the older man's. "You tell me, Doctor."

"I do not see you as an equal." Hannibal said, causing Will to raise his brow in surprise. "I see you as something above me. Something I have been given the grace to touch." He finished, turning his head back to the road as the light turned green.

Will was silent, taking in Hannibal's words. To know that Hannibal saw almost everyone in the world as mere pawns, below him in every way – to know that Will was the very singular expectation for Hannibal's view of the world, he couldn't help but feel a rise of hope in his stomach. He wasn't sure what the hope was for, he just knew that it was now there.

His thoughts flickered back to their only argument. How Will was given the chance to leave with Hannibal, and still, he didn't take it. Although Will was still of the belief that their separation happened for a reason, he couldn't help but feel curious about the theoretical outcome of him leaving London with Hannibal.

Will took his gaze off Hannibal, staring idly at the passing trees alongside the road. "I betrayed you like a man, yet you still believe in me like a God."

The car was silent again.

Will rubbed his thumb softly over the skin of Hannibal's knuckle. "You don't need my *grace* to touch me." He whispered into the quiet air, a touch of amusement in his voice. He could

see the flashing blue and red lights as they approached the given street, and was already beginning to dread leaving the warmth of Hannibal's heated car.

As Hannibal finished pulling in to park, he turned to face Will. "I assure you I won't take that permission for granted."

Will smiled, recalling all the times Hannibal had seemingly tried to be as close to touching him as possible. "I know you won't."

They gazed at each other in the parked car for what could've been seconds to hours. The sky around them was dark, however lit up with the lights of the FBI's gear. The lit-up street at night could've looked almost beautiful if it wasn't for the morbid story behind it.

Will could feel their bodies subconsciously moving closer to each other, moving his hips as he found himself leaning over the centre console.

Hannibal took a short breath in, and the younger man's attention instantly shot to his lips. He couldn't help but notice how Hannibal wore a slightly distressed expression. His usual blank stare was still present, but his eyes seemed different. "Will, I–"

Hannibal's words were abruptly cut off by a sharp knock on the passenger window. Will's attention quickly moved onto the source of the knock, with the sudden noise making him jump from his relaxed position, his hands slipping out the gentle grip of Hannibal's.

All the windows in Hannibal's Bentley, apart from the windshield, were tinted so the average passerby wouldn't be able to see in, unless they pressed their face up against it. Will recalled how Hannibal's old Rolls Royce had the same features, and how he'd always appreciated the added privacy of being able to look out when people can't look in.

Right now, he had never been so thankful for Hannibal's design choices, as he rolled down his window to reveal Jack Crawford.

Will wasn't too sure what he would've done if his boss had caught him holding hands in a silent car with his psychiatrist. It wasn't that they were doing anything else other than what it had looked like, he just wasn't sure how he'd explain such a thing without sounding even more unstable than Jack initially thought he was. Jack would probably send him on another vacation to the BSHCI if he attempted to explain that he and Hannibal had actually met in a coffee shop in England two decades ago.

"Out you get," Jack was leaning down slightly, talking at Will. He then turned, taking a hand out of his pocket and pointing to an alleyway, which was filled with lights and people. "The body's over there. All we're waiting on is you. So hurry up."

Hannibal grimaced at the added venom of Jack's words. Hearing someone speak so carelessly to his dear Will left a sour taste on the tip of tongue.

"My apologies, Agent Crawford." Jack's attention quickly switched from Will to Hannibal at the sudden sound of the Doctor's voice. "I believe I took a wrong turn, causing us to be a little late along the way. American roads can be so confusing sometimes." He obviously left

out the fact that he took the long way, in hopes of spending more time with Will in a small, enclosed space.

Jack's expression morphed from one of annoyance to light amusement and understanding. "It's quite alright Doctor Lecter. Even I get lost around these areas occasionally."

Hannibal gave a small nod as he watched Jack turn away and walk off. He rolled Will's window back up using the small control panel on his door, allowing their privacy to return.

"And how long have you lived in America for, might I ask, Doctor?" Will asked sarcastically.

"I've found that even after eighteen years, my brain still returns to old habits." Hannibal answered with a smile.

Will nodded with amusement. "Don't worry I believe you, Mister-european-driver-on-the-left."

Hannibal shrugged. "You Americans and your strange ways." He said, matching the sarcastic tone of Will's comment.

"Yeah-yeah." Will rolled his eyes as he unbuckled his seatbelt and opened the heavy car door.

They walked side by side to the lit alleyway, with Will walking ahead to get a closer look of what he was seeing. Hannibal stood back, content with simply watching the younger man from the sidelines.

Jack stood by Will as they both stared up at the body. It was a man, his back skinned and hung like wings that resembled an angel. A mix of dry and wet blood had trickled down the concrete wall and scaffolding that the body was strung to, creating a beautiful painting of the wings appearing as if they were melting.

"Somebody got an orchiectomy real cheap." Will heard Brian say as he leant down to collect the evidence.

Beverly pointed her flashlight to the victim's crotch. "Doesn't look like the victims. He castrated himself?" She asked, even though they all already knew the answer.

Will nodded slowly, coming to an understanding. "He isn't just making angels, he's getting ready to become one himself." Brian gave him a raised eyebrow, not quite understanding Will's process of thinking as per usual. "Angels don't have genitalia." He added as an explanation.

"So he was afraid of dying, now he's what? Getting used to the idea?" Jack asked solemnly, turning to direct his voice at Will.

"He– he's accepting it, or he's bargaining." Will rubbed a hand over his forehead in an attempt to soothe the rising ache.

Jack furrowed his brow. "So does this mean he's done *making* angles, or is he just getting started?"

“I don’t know.” Will replied quickly, moving his hand from his head to rub the back of his neck anxiously.

Jack sighed in frustration. “Well he’s not just killing them when he’s sleepy. How’s he choosing them?” The anger in his voice became more prominent as he ended his question.

Will could feel Jack’s frustration, and it was beginning to rub off on him. “I don’t know, ask him.” He replied with annoyance.

“I’m asking you.” Jack shot back, raising his voice at the special agent.

Will finally turned to face his boss. “You’re the head of the behavioural science unit, Jack. Why don’t you come up with your own answers if you don’t like mine.” He relied, matching the amount of venom in Jack’s previous comment.

Jack stepped forward wordlessly, moving so he was in front of Will. “I did not hear that.” He shouted, his voice echoing off the tall walls of the inclosed buildings. “Did I?”

Will kept silent, staring blankly at Jack’s angry expression. Their gaze was suddenly broken, not by Will surprisingly, when Jack looked at something behind the younger man. His face quickly softened to one of less rage and more worry.

The three faces of the science time matched Jack’s as well as they too looked just over Will’s shoulder.

As soon as Will felt the looming presence behind him, he understood why Jack’s expression had changed to one of such.

“It’s my professional opinion that Will would benefit in a little time alone with our victim here.” Gave the accented voice from behind Will. He could feel the hot moisture of Hannibal’s breath against his ears, causing them to flush red in the cold night air.

Without a word, Beverly, Brian and Jimmy left with quick strides. Jack glanced from Hannibal to Will suspiciously. It was clear that wanted to somehow come out as ‘the winner’ in the argument he had created.

With one last look at Hannibal, Jack nodded. “Whatever works.” He muttered before joining the rest of the agents.

Will finally turned to face Hannibal. He almost laughed at the irony of Hannibal suggesting that Will be alone, then going on to stay himself.

“You were like some sort of omen of death. Looming over me like the grim reaper.” Will slipped his hands into his pockets, suddenly feeling a weight lift off his chest.

Hannibal glanced back to check if they were alone, and thankfully found that they were. “At Least I scared the crows away.”

“That’s probably because you’re dressed like a rich person’s scarecrow.” Will smirked.

Hannibal tilted his head, looking Will up and down in response. “I would retaliate, but unfortunately you do look quite dashing in that jacket.”

Will’s eyes widened with his smile. “Oh yeah? It’s alright I guess. Too bad the person who got it for me is some old Lithuanian guy who doesn’t know when to quit complaining about someone’s aftershave.”

Hannibal nodded solemnly. “The day you used my shower gel rather than that dreaded aftershave was truly one of my happiest.” He said, tilting his head up as he reminisced of the delicious scent.

“Unfortunately I can’t just run over to your bathroom whenever I need a shower.”

“You’re welcome to if you’re ever in the area.”

“Well I’ll keep that in mind won’t I.”

“I hope you do.”

Both men knew that Jack hadn’t left them alone for them to have a chat, and Will wasn’t in favour of making his boss angrier than he’d already seen him, so he turned to face the victim.

Hannibal stepped to the side, allowing Will to focus on the task at hand.

He watched curiously as the younger man stood silently, with his eyes closed and head tilted upwards at the hanging body. His eyes moved rapidly behind his eyelids, as if they were searching for something in the darkness.

They spent another 10 minutes in silence before Will’s body started to sway uneasily, causing Hannibal to take a small step closer. He moved in silence, trying not to create a presence that would snap Will out of his mind. The younger man’s fingers twitched at where they hung by his sides, and his teeth appeared to be chattering, even though there also seemed to be a bead of sweat running down his forehead.

As Hannibal moved in closer, the sour smell of sickness became stronger. He had caught a faint scent of it when they arrived at the scene, however he assumed it to be from the slowly rotting body.

Hannibal inhaled deeply as he stood half next to, and half behind Will. It was clear to him that this scent was coming off of Will.

He wasn’t sure why he hadn’t caught scent of it during the car ride, but perhaps it was because of the thick mask of aftershave, that was now being sweated off, and replaced with Will’s natural scent.

As he leaned in closer, Hannibal caught sight of Will’s eyes fluttering open. As he was about to pull back, in hopes of Will not realising that he was smelling him, the younger man’s eyes shut again.

The sound of approaching footsteps suddenly caught Hannibal's ear. He looked behind him to see Jack Crawford and the other agents approaching the alleyway.

"He isn't done yet?" Jack shouted from the other end, his voice bouncing off the cold bricks.

Hannibal's expression of curiosity quickly shifted to concern. Was it not common for Will to take so long when doing this? Could it somehow be related to the smell of sickness?

"Not quite. Although,–" Hannibal was cut off by his own instincts.

His eyes still screwed shut, Will stumbled back a step before completely losing his footing. Hannibal's body reacted before his mind did, quickly moving forward and catching the younger man. His right arm curled around Will's ribcage, and his left hand reached to support his back.

Will fell softly into Hannibal's clutch as the older man slowly let himself sink closer to the ground until he was sat. Will's face was buried into Hannibal's shoulder as the older man moved his hand from his ribcage to brush his fingers into unruly brown curls.

Will's lips quivered for a moment. "Hannibal." He muttered as his mouth was left agape in unconsciousness.

"Will?" Hannibal asked into the air. He hadn't realised how panicked he really felt until the name left his mouth. His throat felt scratchy and cold, and his voice sounded out of breath.

The team of FBI agents had broken into a run as soon as they realised what was happening and had now reached the two men.

Jack stood helplessly in front of them, unsure of what to do. "Doctor Lecter, what's wrong with him?"

Hannibal was too panicked to feel frustrated about Jack's insensitive way of referring to his dear Will. He brought his fingers away from the younger man's hair to check his pulse. Fortunately, the soft but rapid beat was there. They sat on the floor together, with Will laid on Hannibal's thighs on his back, with the older man's arm holding his head to his shoulder.

"It's possible that he simply fainted from exhaustion. Although his skin feels hot, so it may also be due to a fever." Hannibal didn't take his eyes off of Will as he spoke, and his hand returned to the back of Will's head.

Jack stood tall in front of the two men on the floor. "Did he say anything before he knocked out?" He asked, sounding as calm as he did ten minutes ago.

Hannibal nodded, recalling the way Will spoke his name, so gently, before falling into him. "He called out to me just before falling."

Jack sighed coldly. "Did he not mention anything about the angel maker?"

Hannibal was never sure when his breaking point would come, but he was sure he would soon find out. He broke his gaze away from Will to stare up at Jack. "Agent Crawford, one of

your employees, *my patient,* is currently passed out on top of me. I believe your best interests should currently be in getting Will Graham medical attention." Hannibal broke his cold stare from Jack's eyes to look around the alleyway. "However, I for some reason cannot see anyone coming to help him." His voice was desolate, but still he attempted to keep his face clean of any expression.

Jack looked completely stunned. His mouth hung open slightly, and his eyes were wide with surprise and fury. He nodded slowly before turning his body away from the doctor. "Someone tell medical that an agent has collapsed. Make it a priority right now." He shouted to no one in particular.

Hannibal's attention was now back on Will. He cradled the younger man's head as he breathed heavily into his shoulder. Running a stray finger of Will's ears, Hannibal counted the bumps over his earlobes, and was pleasantly reminded of the holes left behind from piercings. He counted seven on the outer part of his ear, including cartilage and lobe, then another two on the rook and tragus.

He couldn't believe how panicked he'd felt at Will's sudden collapse. When Will had begun to seize the two previous times, Hannibal had recalled feeling concerned, but not quite as severely as this.

Feeling the younger man's heartbeat begin to steady, and his breathing start to even out, Hannibal wondered if Will had awoken.

"Mylimasis?" He whispered faintly, bringing Will to rest in a lying position.

He was then met with a pressured hand pressing against his thigh as Will attempted to prop himself up.

Hannibal quickly moved against him. "Mylimasis, you should rest."

Will's eyes slowly fluttered open at the sound of Hannibal's voice, blinking over and over again as he got used to the bright lights. Realising who was staring up at, he broke into a sudden smile, which quickly infected Hannibal's expression as well.

"You somehow look more relaxed when you're panicked."

Hannibal almost blushed at Will's expression. The light of the crime scene bounced off his eyes, highlighting the gold accents in them and the cold air flushed his cheeks and lips a beautiful shade of rose.

He smiled in response to Will's comment, moving a hand to swipe a stray curl out of the agent's face.

"Maybe it's the hint of human emotion on that face. But it could also be that your hair's down." Will carried on. "I'll grow mine out, *just the way you like it,* if you stop attacking yours with gel."

Hannibal raised his eyebrows. "Is that a deal?" He asked.

“Certainly is.” Will replied, his southern drawl returning for a moment.

After sitting obnoxiously close to Will as the paramedics on the scene examined him, Hannibal managed to convince them, (or more or less intimidate them), into releasing Will back to him.

They managed to slip away from Jack with the promise of a report by tomorrow afternoon. Without another word, Hannibal drove Will back to the academy. At first, he attempted to convince Will to stay the night in Baltimore, and have Hannibal drive him to work tomorrow morning, however Will was quick to shut down that idea with a plethora of excuses.

“It doesn’t usually go like that.” Will said after a couple seconds of silence in the car. “I’m usually only out for a few minutes.”

“Was there something wrong today?” Hannibal asked curiously, hoping to get onto the topic of whatever sickness Will may have.

Will struggled to put his words together, stumbling over breaths and sounds. “It was different. I was in the mind of a killer, just not the right one.”

“This victim was not one of the angel maker’s?” Hannibal questioned in reply.

“No, no, not that.” Will pulled in the skin around his nails. “I was the angel maker at first, but then I just wasn’t.”

“You jumped through to another killer’s mind.”

“It would seem so. But, it all felt so strange, and much more welcoming than the angel maker’s. This killer’s mind was comfortable, in the familiar sense.”

“You feel you’ve met this supposedly new killer before?”

“It sure felt like it.”

Hannibal sighed and nodded, glancing towards the younger man’s tired form. “You should rest now, try to focus your mind on something more pleasant.”

Will hummed in agreement, already feeling his eyes droop with exhaustion.

-Espoir-

Will walked along the concrete road beneath his feet. It was cold against his bare skin, and painful as the rough material cut up his flesh as he moved. He felt aware of his surroundings,

as if he knew how and why he was here. There was certainly a reason for it, and that was all Will knew.

He squinted his eyes at the view ahead, trying to make out the red and blue flashing lights in the distance.

Standing still, Will realised that these lights were coming closer, and becoming less of a blue as they did so.

He shielded his eyes from the bright beam of a car light, however made no move to get out of the way. He didn't feel the need to.

"You lost?" A voice asked him.

Will took his hand away from his eyes, and revealed two cops standing in front of him. The one who had spoken shined a torch in his face, which made Will turn his head to the side in an attempt to block the blinding light.

"What?" Will asked breathlessly, although he wasn't so sure as to why he was out of breath.

The cop seemed almost as confused as he was. "What's your name?" He asked, keeping a stern tone.

Will blinked profusely. His vision was still blurry and the amount of lights on him wasn't exactly helping. He thought for a few moments about his answer before speaking. "Will Graham."

The other cop looked nervously around the area, glancing at the bushes beside the road.

"Do you know where you are, Mister Graham?" His tone had shrunk slightly to a more worried or sympathetic one.

Will could see the white vapour of his breath as shivered. "No."

"Where do you live?" The cop asked, bringing his torch down to sit at his hip.

Will suppressed a small cough. "Wolftrap Virginia." He tried not to sound too hopeful, silently praying that he hadn't wandered too many states from his home.

"Well we're in Wolftrap, so that's good." The cop nodded optimistically. "Means you're close to home."

Will's neck felt stiff as he tried to nod along with him.

The cop shined a light next to the spot by Will's feet. "Is that yours?" He asked.

Bringing his focus to where the man was pointing, Will discovered that he hadn't been as alone as he originally thought. "Winston." He said softly as he moved to pet the dog's head. The animal wined and brought itself closer to Will, burning his neck into the backs of Will's knees.

The cop looked back from the dog to Will. “Why don’t we take you home?” It was more of a statement than a request.

“Okay.” Was all Will managed as he covered his bare arms with his hands in an attempt to warm his freezing body.

The more quiet of the two officers brought Will a blanket and ushered him into the back of the car. Winston followed suit.

Officer shine-a-light-in-the-weirdos-face talked to Will through the open window of the car door. “Are you on any drugs, medication– prescription or otherwise?” He asked.

“No.” Will faced down, staring at his bare knees.

“You been drinking?” The cop asked. His confusion to Will’s strange situation was only becoming more apparent.

“No–” Will cut himself off. “Yes. Not excessively. I had two fingers of whiskey before I went to bed.” It was more of an assumption than a fact. He couldn’t remember anything about going to sleep, but it was safe to assume that he went through his usual routine of pouring a glass before he attempted to rest.

The last days had been a blur of strung together memories of Will trying to differentiate between what was real or not. He wasn’t sure if the time he’d remembered going to sleep was even the most recent.

“Do you have a history of sleepwalking, Mister Graham?”

Will sighed, bringing his hand to scratch lightly behind Winston’s ears. For the first time in their interaction, he brought his eyes up to meet the officer’s. “I’m not even sure if I’m awake now.”

Chapter End Notes

OKAY I SWEAR THIS WAS ON TRACK TO COME OUT EARLY.

howeverrrrr I am very prone to literally any disease, and I currently have a sinus infection!!!!!!!!!

If you noticed that the writing becomes a little 'shittier' towards the end, it's because I was more focused in breathing than writing

Also, if you didn't know, it's currently exam season in the UK right now, so I apologise if any future chapters are a little late :)))))

THANKS FOR KEEPING UP WITH ME AS ALWAYS <3333333

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